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Glorious
Bodies

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TRANS THEOLOGY
AND RENAISSANCE
LITERATURE

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*For Simone and Will,
for building something glorious with me.*

[CHAPTER ONE]

A Woman's Prick

Trans Technogenesis in Sonnet 20

In the interview that concludes *This Economy Kills: Pope Francis on Capitalism and Social Justice*, the pope fields a question on ecological disaster and man's responsibility toward the environment. In response, he offers a synopsis of various threats to creation, "the gift God has given to humanity," a list that includes global poverty, the "idolatry of wealth," and a "culture of waste" alongside climate change, euthanasia, and war.¹ Bundled into this catalogue of catastrophes are trans people, whom the pope denounces as "Herods" who "plot schemes of death and disfigure the face of man and woman, destroying creation," a danger comparable to nuclear bombs.² This was not the first time that Pope Francis publicized his charming opinions on transition. While addressing a group of Polish bishops, he condemned not only trans rights, but the very existence of trans people as an "exploitation of creation" and "the annihilation of man as the image of God."³ At fault, he asserted, is an "ideology of gender" according to which "children—children!—are taught in school that everyone can choose his or her sex." His Holiness then darkly intimated that this insidious transgender pedagogy amounts to an "ideological colonization" not unlike those undertaken by "the Balilla and the Hitler Youth."⁴ These comments may be surprising, coming as they do from Pope Francis, the *good* pope, endlessly praised by liberals for his generally progressive views on poverty and global capitalism, climate change, evolution, divorce, and gay rights. When asked about his attitude toward gay people, for instance, the pope shrugged off the question with a famously controversial response: "Who am I to judge?"⁵ But whereas the homosexual is addressed in his capacity as "an individual person, in his wholeness and dignity," such grace is not to be extended to trans people, who represent a species-level threat.⁶ Not your run-of-the-mill deviants, trans people are guilty of a "new sin against God the Creator" and embody an existential threat to life itself on the order of ecological catastrophe, genocide, and nuclear war.⁷

Solemnly invoking Genesis in support of policies that make trans life

unlivable is a favored tactic of the religious right. In such circles, "creation" has become a byword for a divinely authorized design that enshrines binary sex as natural, moral, and inalterable. We are to understand that this well-ordered cosmos centered on the heterosexually paired cisgender couple is being menaced by the ideological system of "transgenderism." Pope Francis's assessment of the perils courted by a society that embraces its trans members is not different from these other reactionary positions in its stridency. What separates the pope's transphobia from his interlocutors, rather, is its theological sophistication and intellectual rigor. For the most part, conservative Christian organizations and thinkers are content to demonize trans people by limply gesturing at Genesis 1:27, which has God crafting the originary couple male and female, as if the meaning of that verse were self-evident.⁸ The trans-antagonistic position espoused by Pope Francis, by contrast, flows from an elaborate conceptual system that threads together Biblical exegesis, social justice, and integral ecology. This particular account of Genesis is particularly insidious because it validates transphobia as part of a worldview that is, by and large, amenable to liberal thought. Like many other Christian exponents of transphobia, Pope Francis works on the assumption that trans embodiment is a recent phenomenon, a byproduct of cutting-edge medical technology that constitutes a uniquely modern threat to what is essentially settled theology. I contest this point of view by casting the trans-exclusive gospel of creation as an iteration of early modern theological debates about how the Book of Genesis handles gendered embodiment, technology, and human artifice. Rather than putting religion in its place by invoking a different master discourse (perhaps medical science or psychiatry), this critique mounts a theological challenge to the weaponization of Genesis as part of a project of religious transphobia. I propose Shakespeare's transfeminine revision of Genesis in Sonnet 20 as an alternative to the static, immobile creation trotted out in support of transphobia. As such, this chapter has two aims: first, to incorporate Genesis into trans history as a text that situates transition, rebirth, and prosthesis as part and parcel of creaturely life; and secondly, to explore the ongoing value of early modern religious writing for imagining trans lifeworlds today.

The ecological coordinates of Pope Francis's hostility to trans people emerged early in his papacy, a position crystallized in his first single-authored encyclical, *Laudato Si': On the Care for our Common Home*.⁹ Borrowing its title from St. Francis of Assisi's *Canticle of the Creatures*, the encyclical outlines a theological platform for climate justice centered on the sacred intertwining of human life with the environs that support and sustain us. This "integral ecology," which draws heavily on Leonardo Boff's

environmentalist strain of liberation theology, turns on the “conviction that the divine and the human meet in the slightest detail in the seamless garment of God’s creation.”¹⁰ The suspicion that transition, or even androgyny, must catch and tear at this “seamless garment” finds a scriptural basis in Genesis 1:26 and 27: “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our own image according to our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea, and over the fowls of the heaven, and over the beasts, & over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth & moveth on the earth.’ Thus God created the man in his image; in the image of God created he him: he created them male and female.”¹¹

A healthy social ecology and sense of environmental responsibility have their basis in the “great biblical narrative” in which God fashions man after His own image. These verses buttress the “infinite” and “inalienable dignity” afforded to each person who “is not just something, but someone,” an agent endowed with “self-knowledge” and “self-possession” capable of “entering into communion with other persons.”¹² The status of the human body as the *imago dei* guarantees the essential dignity granted to every person, the “fundamental, unearned, equally shared moral status” that forms the basis for rights.¹³ Moreover, the creation of men and women in the likeness of God grounds the possibility of community and neighbor-love as an expression of divine love, while also establishing man’s dominion over the created world, our “common home,” as a kind of benevolent, paternalistic stewardship. Sexual dimorphism and complementary gender roles are foundational to this harmonious creation. “Valuing one’s own body in its femininity or masculinity is . . . an essential element of any genuine human ecology,” the encyclical reads, “whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation.”¹⁴ This line of thought was deepened and expanded in Francis’s apostolic exhortation *Amoris Laetitia*, a celebration of marriage and family life that took aim at “gender ideology,” assisted reproductive technology, and gay marriage as impediments to “caring for the environment as our common home.”¹⁵ More recently, the document “Male and Female He Created Them” castigates the “utopia of the ‘neuter’ [that] eliminates both human dignity in sexual distinctiveness and the personal nature of the generation of new life.”¹⁶ Here too, deviation from a cisgender norm is plaited together with a host of other degenerate practices that sever human life from the natural order of creation and divine providence. The “*educational crisis*” initiated by this insidious “gender theory” has seeded curricula with “ideas of ‘intersex’ or ‘transgender’” that are covertly aligned with “similar theories” destined to “annihilate the concept of ‘nature,’ (that is, everything we have been given as a pre-existing foun-

ation of our being and action in the world).”¹⁷ By obliterating sexual difference, the trans body effaces the likeness of the Creator that inheres in the human form, the body which we must “accept . . . as God’s gift” as a necessary precondition for “welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father.”¹⁸ Like surrogacy and in vitro fertilization, hormone therapies and gender-affirming surgeries commodify the body and subject it to the clever but misguided techniques of physicians who abuse their creative powers to refashion the perfect work of God the Creator. From such a perspective, transition amounts to a hubristic assault on creation itself that undermines the material basis of community, personal dignity, and environmental harmony.

Pitting Genesis against trans embodiment in this way evinces a deep suspicion of artifice and artifactuality, the capacities of human ingenuity to generate a world of man-made creations that occlude, or even subvert, God’s design. This fear of technical fabrication presses the pope’s transphobia into long-standing philosophical debates concerning the nature and function of technics. Drawing on Aristotle, Bernard Stiegler glosses technicity as the “domain of skill” or craft that governs the transformation of “raw material” into fabricated products.¹⁹ *Technē* comprises both skilled labor and actuated knowledge that modifies an environment by engaging with it: cooking is a technique, as is building a house, and so too are the routines of housekeeping. Rhetoric, speech, and poetry belong under the rubric of technical fabrication—*poiesis*, after all, means *making*, and like *technē* it entails a process of revealing, self-disclosure, and bringing-forth. From this perspective, technical practices mobilize the self-organizing energies of objects and environments in ways that may serve human desires but are not reducible to them. Instead, the bright-line distinction between the natural and the prosthetic blur in Stiegler’s account, since human projects of thinking, making, and doing occur in concert with an object world that possesses its own creative energies. These lively powers, in turn, shape the human through a “double plasticity” that leads to the paradox of “the technical inventing the human, and the human inventing the technical.”²⁰ Rather than forming sharply defined and hierarchically organized categories, humans and tools constantly modify each other as advances in technology redound on the human organism. This evolutionary spiral amounts to a “process of exteriorization” or a “pursuit of life by means other than life,” a recursive co-evolution of human and technical forms that Stiegler names *technogenesis*.²¹

By this logic, transition is a form of technical thinking. Not just produced through the skilled labor of a surgeon who assumes the position of God the Creator, transness is also the result of a wide diffusion of specialist knowledge. Given the hostility of the medical establishment to trans

patients, transitioning has often been a DIY project that relies on skill sharing. Today, such enskillment is mediated through social networks and YouTube tutorials that offer guides for everything from vocal training to self-regulating pharmacological regimens, in the event that doctors prove hesitant, hostile, or incompetent.²² The medical regimes, sartorial styles, dietary routines, and surgical interventions that facilitate transition render the trans body into a technical object. From the perspective of media theory, there is nothing especially radical or disparaging about this proposition, since the coevolution of humans and technics ensure that every human body is prosthetic from inception. It is this possibility of technogenesis that the pope rejects when he dismisses the “techniques and practices” of transition as a misguided product of human efforts to reverse engineer a world fashioned by God.²³ As creatures that are, in Susan Stryker’s words, “technological constructions” pieced together from “flesh torn apart and sewn together again,” trans bodies tangle the lines of mastery that flow from God to Adam and thence to his sons.²⁴ In this respect, transphobia is an expression of technophobia, a fear of how technology offers seductive tools that ultimately alienate us from our bodies, nature, and God. In order to preserve its coherence, then, the position articulated by the pope and his adherents must suppress two different problems: first, the long history of controversy attached to the ambiguous language that has God creating man “male and female”; and secondly, the philosophical disputes surrounding the capacities and dangers of human ingenuity. Both the theoretical and theological questions were at stake in early modern treatments of Genesis.

Despite the conviction with which right-wing reactionaries leverage the Biblical creation myth against trans populations, it is not so clear that Genesis reifies binary gender as native to the created body. Premodern theologians and philosophers read the language of Genesis 1:27, in which God creates man in his own image, as harboring a range of possible interpretations, not all of which fix binary gender as a natural, unadulterated state of being inscribed in creation itself. Witness the millennia-old debate about whether Genesis implies that Adam was a hermaphrodite.²⁵ The text of Genesis was sometimes understood to suggest that before Eve existed as a separate creature, woman was physically lodged within Adam’s body. Rabbinic literature and the Gnostic gospels propose various arrangements for this body, which is variously called hermaphroditic, androgynous, or bisexual.²⁶ The Genesis and Leviticus Rabbahs suggest that Adam may have had two faces for his two genders; then, subsequently, perhaps God “sawed” the already two-faced Adam down to the trunk, equipping him with “two fronts” and “two backs,” one male and one female.²⁷ Even the translation of “female” is not straightforward in the Genesis Rabbah, which translates the

Septuagint as stating that “a male with his female parts created he them” or even “a male with orifices He created him.”²⁸

As opposed to the fleshiness of the Midrashic accounts, a Platonizing impulse lies behind other Jewish and patristic works which assert that the “image of God” must reference an ideal, disembodied, and ungendered creation. These accounts splice Genesis with Plato’s *Symposium*, enlisting Adam as the primal androgyne described by Aristophanes.²⁹ Philo of Alexandria, for instance, zeroed in on the shifting pronouns of Genesis 1:27 as evidence of an initial creation that was essentially spiritual, culminating in a being that was “incorporeal, neither male nor female, by nature incorruptible.”³⁰ Only later did a secondary modification afford Adam a physical form, a gender, and a “helper” (that is, Eve).³¹ Assigning Adam a body did not bring about the greater perfection of the prototype. Instead, gendered corporeality amounted to a traumatic deviation from an originary pattern that cleaved more closely to the likeness of God. The androgynous template Philo assigned to Adam appealed to later Egyptian Christian fathers, including Clement of Alexandria and Origen. Because God’s likeness could not be adequately contained in the base matter of the body, Origen asserted, it must be “our inner man, invisible, incorporeal, incorruptible, and immortal which is made ‘according to the image of God.’”³² It is perhaps understandable that an androgynous template would have been so appealing to this particular church father, whose “youthful self-castration” remains something of a scandal in theological circles.³³ Other church fathers felt the loss of primal androgyny even more sharply. In *De hominis opificio*, “On the Fabrication of Man,” Gregory of Nyssa imagines binary gender and sexual reproduction or “animal generation” as unfortunate effects of the Fall, a tragic movement away from the original unity that characterized bodily experience in paradise.³⁴ Moreover, the belief that the resurrection would restore us to the state of incorruptible, androgynous wholeness that characterized this initial creation appeared thereafter in the work of many patristics, including Basil of Caesarea, John Damascene, Gregory Nazanian, and Maximus the Confessor.³⁵

The possibility that the human body, as wrought in the perfect image of God, might take an androgynous form vested with multiple sets of genitalia was, of course, never the dominant interpretation of Genesis. Despite the pedigree of its adherents, the Adam-androgyne was decried by no lesser an authority than Augustine, who confessed to a certain reluctance to even say “God made him male and female” for fear of suggesting “something monstrous . . . such as those they call hermaphrodites.”³⁶ Later theologians fell in line behind Augustine’s magisterial opinion, issuing huffy condemnations of the complexly gendered Adam. Scholastic commentaries on Genesis by

Peter the Chanter and Nicholas of Lyra, as well as the anonymous treatise *On the Human Body* firmly insisted that corporeal creation was marked by gender difference from the first.³⁷ The ill repute of the Adam-androgyne persisted through the Reformation and into the seventeenth century, generating denunciations that frequently took on a distinctly anti-Semitic character. Martin Luther's "Lectures on Genesis," for instance, condemns the "Talmudic tales" according to which "man was created bisexual and later on, by divine power, was, as it were, split or cut apart," along with all the "obscene details" such stories have accrued over time.³⁸ In a similar vein, Milton's *Tetrachordon* firmly rejects the possibility that "man at first had been created Hermaphrodite," despite the "accidental concurrence between Plato's wit" and "the Jews' fable."³⁹ Approaching the possibility from the vantage of Baconian empiricism, Thomas Browne's *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* rejects the primal androgyne as contrary to reason, refusing to "concede a monstrosity, or mutilate the integrity of Adam."⁴⁰ For Browne, the perfection of a body that could simultaneously experience all possible genders registers not as an enhancement but a diminishment, a grotesque mutilation of the normative human body. And so, despite Christianity's early adoption of the androgynous Adam, Renaissance scholars and theologians passionately repudiated the hermaphroditic model of creation that had been incubated in Jewish, Persian, Greek, and patristic belief systems.

And yet, even if the Adam-androgyne was roundly condemned, it was never fully stricken from the record, stubbornly persisting into early modernity quite in spite of its illustrious opposition.⁴¹ Manuals of astral magic and alchemy adopted the hermaphrodite as an emblem of mystical transmutation.⁴² The degendered soul envisioned by Origen circulated along with his *Homilies on Genesis*, edited by Jacques Merlin and later Erasmus, a text that went through nine printings in the sixteenth century.⁴³ The biform body of the first man entered the thought of Neoplatonists like Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and Leone Ebreo, who imagined the reintegration of ideal forms and drossy matter as a return to masculo-feminine perfection.⁴⁴ Often this ecstatic union was analogized to marital harmony or sexual embrace, as in Geoffrey Fenton's 1572 translation of Etienne Pasquier's *Monophile*, which praises the "woonderfull effectes" of a love that "distils two spirites into one bodye" as a method for "returning to the first *Androgina* of our father Adam."⁴⁵ The erotic dimensions of the hermaphroditic Genesis enlivened lyric poetry and drama, as in the work of Ben Jonson, whose *New Inn* has Lord Beaufort asserting that "man and woman / Were, in the first Creation, both one piece, / And being cleft asunder, ever since, / Loue was an appetite to be reioyn'd."⁴⁶ Despite the scorn and scandal, then, the queer genders implicit in Genesis could never quite be suppressed, remaining a

rich conceptual reservoir for imagining expansive forms of embodiment. These theological debates surrounding the lineaments of Adam's gender and the desirability, or even sanctity, of a bigender body make it difficult to retrieve Genesis as a straightforward endorsement of binary sex. Adam's body, multiply gendered, hollowed out, womb-bearing, sawed in half, lacking nothing, seminal and inseminated, was never merely cisgender. Across a kaleidoscopic range of genres, early modern writers toyed with the complex, surprising, and queer configurations of gender and sexuality that animate the Biblical creation myth.

Moreover, in addition to disputes over the exact contours of the created body, the possibility that gender might be available for technical fabrication was also a source of religious controversy in the Renaissance. As Jennifer Waldron brilliantly argues in work on Protestant theology and media theory, reformers' iconoclastic suspicion of man-made images initiated debates over the dangers of human artifice, gender, and technology.⁴⁷ Waldron turns to Calvin's sharp distinction between the initial creation, which served as one of God's instruments for "reaching down and pulling humans up to him" and an object world manufactured from the "accretions of human culture" that not only "attenuated divine intentions but actively blocked them."⁴⁸ This religious critique of technics, Waldron argues, genders *technē* as feminine. Literature of the period associated femininity with artifice on the grounds that women were given to cosmetic practices that distort the "raw matter" of the body in its natural simplicity.⁴⁹ Worse yet, painting was not merely a surface-level intervention, a temporary adornment that could be removed to restore the subject to her unadulterated state. The shockingly toxic ingredients conscripted into early modern beauty routines could permanently alter the skin, hair, and neurological systems of those who used them. Bleaching the skin with a mixture made of quicksilver, lemon, and turpentine (to be worn for eight days) might indeed help a woman achieve that special glow, but, the recipe's author cautions, "you would think the said composition burned or flaid off the skinne of your face."⁵⁰ As Thomas Tuke warns in his *Discourse against Painting and Tincturing*, such practices appropriate the privileges of God the Creator and insinuate a split nature into the painted figure who, "though shee bee the *creature* of God, as she is a *woman*, yet is . . . her own *creatrice*, as she is a *picture*."⁵¹ There are religious ramifications to the technical practice of painting, which seem to transform the natural body into a particularly dangerous type of object. Tuke asks his browbeaten reader, "Dost thou love thyself artificiall, and like an Idoll?"⁵² In loving herself "artificiall," the made-up woman is transformed into a graven image impiously adoring her own craftsmanship. By exercising creative power over the created body, the

cosmetically enhanced subject commits a kind of sacrilege by transforming the human physique into an artifact, a technical object, rendered material.

This exegetical history of Genesis exposes the conceptual weakness behind the contemporary varieties of Christian transphobia espoused by papal encyclicals and evangelical statements. Such positions depend on a thin reading of Genesis according to which the creation of the gendered body was a single event that culminated in unambiguously sexed bodies built for heterosexual coupling. This interpretation is belied by the resilience of the Adam-androgyne, which speaks to the swarm of gendered possibilities nested within Genesis. To be constructed in the image of God does not necessarily mean being limited to a narrowly defined, patriarchal maleness. Instead, it might involve a capacious relationship to embodiment that entails simultaneously experiencing all conceivable genders and sexualities. Moreover, such accounts of Genesis suggest that the initial rollout of Adam did not go as planned. This creation was not a fixed point but an evolving process, an unfolding sequence of bodily configurations subject to revisions, modifications, augmentations, and retractions. These adjustments were not only top-down impositions mandated by an omniscient Creator-God. Instead, Genesis frames a scene in which human activity was implicated in the nascence of gendered embodiment: sinning, naming, entreating, desiring, sleeping, trusting, lying, rebelling, and appareling all contributed to the reformatting of corporeality, with important consequences for gender and sexuality. The fear that this creative restructuring of the body did not end with Genesis feeds into the technophobic suspicion of artifactuality that lies beneath the opposition to cosmetics and idolatry. As such, the Renaissance inherited a more elastic, expansive account of Genesis than the restrictive, cishnormative version promoted by right-wing reactionaries today. It was in this context that Shakespeare took up the cluster of issues at stake in the multiple varieties of creation: the transformative capacities of the gendered body; the obscure design for the human form; the *frisson* that attends body modification; the dangers of artifice, in all its senses; and the complicated ways we inhabit the “image” and “likeness” of God. While anti-cosmetic polemics attempted to shore up the distinction between the created body and its artificially manufactured double, Shakespeare’s Sonnet 20 offers another way of thinking about gender, creation, and technicity. It is a poem, after all, about how precisely to make a face—a face so sublimely beautiful that it emanates an aura of irreality:

A woman’s face, with nature’s own hand painted
Hast thou, the master mistress of my passion—
A woman’s gentle heart, but not acquainted

With shifting change, as is false women’s fashion;
An eye more bright than theirs, less false in rolling,
Gilding the object whereupon it gazeth;
A man in hue all hues in his controlling,
Which steals men’s eyes and women’s souls amazeth.
And for a woman wert thou first created,
Till nature as she wrought thee fell a-doting,
And by addition me of thee defeated,
By adding one thing to my purpose nothing.

But since she pricked thee out for women’s pleasure,
Mine be thy love, and thy love’s use their treasure.⁵³

Sonnet 20 has a problem, and that problem is the face. Desiring the master-mistress entails confronting the issues that were always at stake in Genesis’s account of embodiment: whether we can establish the original design for the gendered body, and whether the human capacity to modify our gendered habitus improves upon or damages that prototype. Resolving that confrontation between creation and creativity leads the poem through an assortment of scenes of material fabrication and manual labor, including the artist’s workshop and the aristocratic woman’s closet. Sonnet 20, I will argue, revisits Genesis 1:27 to offer a transfeminine version of the creation myth in which, as Stiegler proposes, the technically constructed body is not outside human experience but central to it.

Technicity is at stake from the very beginning of the poem. The initial suspicion about the potentially artificial features of the youth’s beautiful appearance opens onto the poem’s first site of artistic creation: the workshop of the master painter. The figure of Nature, who may be standing in for God, is mapped onto the figure of the artist, a coupling that was not unusual in the Renaissance. Giorgio Vasari, who invoked God and Nature interchangeably, was fond of casting *Deus artifex* (God the Artificer) as the first artist and man as the first artwork:

God on High . . . descended with His intellect further down into the clarity of the atmosphere and the solidity of the earth, and, shaping man, discovered in the pleasing invention of things the first form of sculpture and painting. Who will deny that from man, as from a true model, statues and sculptures were then gradually carved out along with the difficulties of various poses and their surroundings? . . . Thus, the first model from which issued the first image of man was a mass of earth, and not without reason, for the Divine Architect of Time and Nature, being all perfect, wished to demonstrate in the imperfection of His materials the means

to subtract from them or add to them, in the same way that good sculptors and painters are accustomed to doing when by adding or subtracting from their models, they bring their imperfect drafts to that state of refinement and perfection they seek.⁵⁴

A sculptor, a painter, and an architect, God is a multimodal practitioner whose creation of the earth and of mankind forms the template for all art-forms as the “pleasing invention of things.” Playing fast and loose with Genesis, Vasari imagines a Creator-God bent over the earth, pressing his thumbs into clay, endlessly delighted by his own recreative capacities. This scenario invokes a primary technicity centered on God as the first Maker whose earliest sculpture, the human body, formed a “true model” for later artists, who gradually carved out statues with increasingly lifelike poses. This primary technicity, in turn, ensures that artistic endeavor serves as an extension of that initial creation, installing artists within a genealogy that links them to the Divine Craftsman. The unbroken bond between human artifice and divine workmanship manifests in the artist’s *maniera*, a term derived from the Latin *manus*, or hand. Roughly glossed as “style,” *maniera* also encompassed originality and authenticity; the facility and ease of *sprezzatura*; unfettered artistic license and freedom over the creative process; and finally, the ability to improve upon a model, often by cobbling together the most handsome parts of various bodies, piecing together “the most beautiful hands, heads, bodies, or legs” to generate “the most perfect figure.”⁵⁵ In ascribing the master-mistress’s beauty to the unimpeachable *maniera* of “Nature’s own hand,” Sonnet 20 valorizes the youth’s form as the product of the kind of divine handiwork Vasari describes. The poem begins with a strong claim: no technical practices except those mobilized by Nature contributed to sculpting this exquisite body, explicitly rejecting any scenario in which human hands cleverly touched up the face in a way that marred the Maker’s design. As such, the opening gambit accords this “woman’s face” the dignity and authenticity befitting a masterpiece wrought by a painterly Nature.

Of course, the conceptual maneuvering necessary to position the master-mistress on the good and holy side of that divide requires almost gymnastic flexibility. In the same breath that declares the youth’s beauty genuine and natural, the poem begins to inspect the “woman’s face” like an art object whose authenticity has been thrown into question. Even ascribing the youth’s creation to nature’s “own hand” is equivocal and ambiguous, as it makes use of a formula that doubles the contractual stipulation in artistic commissions specifying that the work was to be rendered by “the master’s own hand” rather than being farmed out to his apprentices.⁵⁶ As

such, the very specification that is meant to bolster the composition’s legitimacy simultaneously summons up the specter of plagiarism built into the workshop system. As Gregory Bredbeck notes, the acoustic pun in Nature’s “own” hand, cognate with “one” hand, transforms the line into a “Janus-like statement,” since “nature’s *other* hand may soon grab a brush and paint again.”⁵⁷ Indeed, the Sonnets more broadly militate against the assumption that nature’s creative power is singular enough to be immediately recognizable as the real thing. Later in the sequence, nature’s hand returns in a subversive reduplication of this image, when Sonnet 127 bemoans how “each hand hath put on nature’s power, / Fairing the foul with art’s false-borrowed face” and “slandr’ing creation” with a manufactured, rather than in-born, beauty (5–6, 12). Nature’s hand can be appropriated to produce derivative, fabricated works that only appear to be the real thing. Despite the initial assertion that the youth’s face was crafted through natural means, then, artifice is almost immediately proposed as an obstacle to be overcome, as expressed in the anti-cosmetic sentiment animating the sequence at large.⁵⁸ Although we are explicitly assured that the artful hand that built the face belongs to nature, “painting” is a term that squirms with paranoia by virtue of its proximity to cosmetics and hence to “seeming,” “appearing” and “deceiving.” The suspicion arises that the handcrafted face inhabits *maniera* in the bad sense, rendering the youth’s body an unholy mixture of the most beautiful spare parts sourced from other bodies. With ambiguity typical of the sonnets, it is impossible to tell where artificiality begins and ends.

Seeking confirmation that the superficial impressions inspired by the youth’s appearance are tethered to the material disposition of body and gender, the poem penetrates inward, matching the “woman’s face” to a “woman’s gentle heart.” This gesture explicitly aligns external appearance with internal truth, the delicacy of the features with an emotional tenderness native to women. It may be that Shakespeare here anticipates a recognizably modern sense of subjectivity or interiority, what Katharine Eisaman Maus describes as a psychic realm which “passeth show” in two senses: first, that “it is beyond scrutiny, concealed where other people cannot perceive it,” and secondly, that “it *surpasses* the visible—its meaning is unimpeachable.”⁵⁹ Anne Ferry specifically attributes this conceptual development to the sonnets, which “concerned themselves with what a modern writer would call the *inner life*” precisely because “it was in love poetry that writers faced most directly the issues involved in representing what is in the heart.”⁶⁰ If appearances are by nature deceptive and subject to misinterpretation, the depth model of selfhood may offer a more reliable access point to the youth’s innate gender. In this fleeting hope that gender could be anchored in youth’s inner world of experience and affect, the poem takes on

a modernizing thrust that would become central to definitions of trans identity in nineteenth- and twentieth-century sexology.⁶¹ From the perspective opened as the poem delves inward, the youth's true gender need not, and maybe cannot, be established through judging the shape of jaw, hairline, cheekbones, and brow against feminine norms. The work of categorization dispenses with external appearance, which is easily manipulable, as the poem seeks a solid ground for judgment in the affective, emotional, and psychic architecture of the "heart."

However promising, the forward momentum of this turn to interiority is halted and reversed almost immediately. The optimistic appeal to inwardness cannot survive the Sonnets' repeated refusals to affiliate the heart with emotional or even anatomical internality. After making its initial appearance in Sonnet 20, the heart returns in Sonnet 22 in the accusation that "all that beauty that doth cover thee / Is but the seemly raiment of my heart, / Which in thy breast dost live" and again in Sonnet 24, where "Mine eye hath played the painter and hath stelled / Thy beauty's form in table of my heart. / My body is the frame wherein 'tis held" (22.4–6, 24.1–3). The heart too is a surface, a page to be decorated, a canvas to be adorned, a homunculus to be costumed. There is no identity at work here, if by that we mean an interiority that is the unique property of an insular subject. The gravitational pull of the attractive face has expropriated and absorbed the lover's heart before subjecting it to further adulterations. The youth's beauty slithers inward, appareling the heart in a gaudy vestment. Sinking deeper, we are met not with a bedrock of inner truth but with the very façade we sought to elude. For a moment, it seems that the shifting sands of appearance can be cross-referenced with interior experience to locate the unadulterated truth of the self beneath the posturing and the paint. And yet, that possibility vanishes in the moment of its articulation. The "woman's heart" that stands as guarantor for the "woman's face" bears more than a passing resemblance to "woman's art," a punning substitution that restores the youth's imagined interiority to a duplicitous exteriority. With this homophone, the nobility of Nature's masterwork deteriorates into a feminized enskillment associated with craft and *cosmesis*. The heart, no less than the face, may be the product of a tampering, too-artful hand.

While the first quatrain attempts to bolster Nature's artifice as a life-affirming craft that binds the human body to the created order, the second quatrain aggravates the dilemmas flowing from technical fabrication by layering Nature's painting with the youth's gilding. In addition to well-documented economic anxieties about gold as a stable measure of value in the aftermath of catastrophic inflation and the influx of precious metals from the New World, the Renaissance also wrapped gold into controversies sur-

rounding artistic technique. Combing through contracts stipulating painters' obligations in executing their commissions, Michael Baxandall found evidence that gilding was part of a broader reassessment of artistic value. Over the Quattrocento, requests for costly pigments like gold and ultramarine were steadily replaced by demands for skill. Essentially, this amounted to an insistence that instead of delegating all the labor to the workshop, the artist would personally handle the most significant parts of the painting—the figures and, in particular, their faces. In this way, Baxandall asserts, "the client will confer lustre on his picture not with gold but with mastery, the hand of the master himself."⁶² From this perspective, gold leaf was a fraudulent shortcut to splendor, and its inclusion on a canvas signaled that the painter lacked the artistry necessary to produce a convincing illusion. Precious minerals like gold were an impediment to naturalism and the representation of unique and lifelike facial expressions. The ambivalent status of gilding speaks to an emergent split between the high art traced by the godlike hand of the master painter and the debased and derivative realm of craft. As a vector of gilding, then, the master-mistress would seem to fall away from the singular creative capacities of nature's own hand.

Moreover, by recruiting "gilding" into the dissection of the youth's authenticity, the poem nudges the act of artisanal creation toward the fraught world of religious iconography and the mortifying power of idols. Protestant suspicion of image-worship triggered waves of "chronoclasm" that targeted the lavishly gilded images, icons, and screenwork that beautified Catholic churches.⁶³ Calvin, for instance, associated these fine veneers with the sacrilegious "pomp" enriching Catholic churches, since "the temple of God cannot exist in its true triumph and glory" when it is "full of gilded trinkets."⁶⁴ At times, the sonnets seem to resist this iconoclastic impulse: Sonnet 33's invocation of the sun's "celestial" and "golden face . . . gilding pale streams," for instance, associates "gilding" with a natural, vivifying luminosity (33.3–4, 6). Elsewhere, however, such embellishment smacks of superficial beautification edging into deception, as in Sonnet 66, which castigates "gilded honor shamefully misplaced" (5), while at other points it takes on sinister connotations of mortification and decay, as in the "gilded monuments" and "gilded tombs" of Sonnets 55 and 101. Like a questionable icon, the master-mistress may well possess a face that has been "gilded" through painting, plucking, and contouring, technical practices that bury the natural body beneath an idolatrous substitute that offends heaven by, in Thomas Tuke's words, "dawbing the living face with dead colours."⁶⁵ The gilded face, like the gilded tomb, signals an inanimate, deadening materiality that the sonnets oppose to the breathy life afforded by poetry, the "pen" that can inspire eternal life "where breath most breathes," with whisps

of the beloved's beauty flowing erotically from mouth to mouth (81.14). Like the bejeweled "stocks and stones" of idolatrous image-worship, the techniques that shaped the artificed face expand, rather than collapse, the distance between man and God.

The irreligiosity inhering within these cosmetic practices only deepens when the youth is pronounced a "man in hue all hues in his controlling." With this twist, the surface-level ornamentation implied by gilding takes on a menacing depth, since "hue," as in color, is printed "hew," as in cut. The meticulous brushwork behind the trompe l'oeil of the handcrafted femme face degenerates into a more agitated stroke. The light touch of tincturing escalates into digging, gouging, and carving. There is a transtemporal resonance to the line: to feminize the face through cutting, not merely contouring, anticipates the surgical interventions that modify and, to some commentators, *define* trans bodies.⁶⁶ There is perhaps not such a great historical distance between early modern face-painting and facial feminization surgery as we might think. Face-flaying was very much on the menu in the sixteenth century, although the procedure was not performed with knives but rather with chemicals like mercury sublimate. As we will see in the next chapter, which lingers over *The Duchess of Malfi's* "abortive hedgehog," Bosola's dismissive name for a woman with a chemically abraded face, such cuts do not merely efface the work of "nature's hand," wresting the youth out of the gender assigned by God. Instead, they eject the hewn body from the natural order altogether, consigning it to prodigious monstrosity.

This ambivalence is heightened by the suspicion that the youth's technical practices are contagious, reproducing according to their own rules. A seductive force that radiates outward from the youth's face, whose eye darts about, "gilding the object whereupon it gazeth." The expert hand that crafts a femme face requires a technical mastery of pigment, such that the youth's unique abilities amass "all hues in his controlling." These skills, in turn, extend to a power over other complexions, as this false face makes other faces flush with desire. In this respect, the feminine artifice that crafted a supplemental face transmutes the youth's admirers into superficial and emasculated figures, mere "objects" that are "gilded" and "gelded" through their lust. This forced feminization might run deeper than the involuntary reflex of the blush, however. The quatrain suggests that "gilding" and "hewing" are the modes through which the prosthetic face reproduces itself via a complex matrix of identification and desire. That is, by inspiring a potent mix of attraction and perplexity in women's "amazed souls," the feminine illusion could engender further instances of cosmetic enhancement. In this reading, the artificial face is a template that could be taken up and copied by anyone who glances at it. Sonnet 3 accuses the youth of being "thy mother's

glass," an image that Helen Vendler calls "replication-in-a-mirror" fundamentally at odds with "replication-by-breeding."⁶⁷ Here, fully in possession of a "woman's face," the youth becomes the mother of her own house, replicating not only *in* a mirror but *by mirroring*. In this scene of technical cocreation, the emergence and evolution of human bodies is midwifed by technological supplementation. The face requires painting to align itself with an idealized femininity; reciprocally, the prosthetic face grafts itself onto other faces. In this way, the technical extension co-opts human bodies to reproduce itself through a potentially endless "process of exteriorization." As such, the master-mistress of Sonnet 20 perversely literalizes the imperious demand of Sonnet 3, in which the youth is ordered to "Look in thy glass and tell the face thou viewest, / Now is the time that face should form another" (3.1-2). Aaron Kunin reads this suggestion as part of the procreation sonnets' "quasi-human sex education," a bizarre moment in which the poem relocates the youth's sex organs to his face "as though a single face could reproduce by parthenogenesis, like an amoeba dividing into two copies of itself."⁶⁸ The replication of the prosthetic face offers a queer twist to the imperative of Genesis 1:28, in which the recently sexed Adam and Eve are told to "be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it." The advent of cosmetic technicity threatens to distort this natural order, replacing God's hierarchical, heteronormative, and anthropocentric creation with a species of technical reproduction that does not need binary gender to multiply or to replenish and subdue the earth.

To take up the vocabulary offered by media theory, the octave espouses an essential technophobia. The youth's body is not only suspect because it might be manufactured by her own hand and thus exist at a remove from the designs of God the Artificer. More concerning still, the feminine *technē* crystallized in the curious face of the master-mistress is a vector of contagion that infects and restructures all the bodies and "souls" in the youth's line of sight. The sestet purports to stabilize the youth's gender by turning away from surface-level phenomena altogether, giving up on the fruitless project of gleaning through potentially fabricated exteriors like the pretty face, demure disposition, feminine gestures, and come-hither glances. Instead, the final lines work to uncover the body in its initial, unadulterated state by revisiting the scene of the youth's genesis, when Nature "by addition me of thee defeated, / By adding one thing to my purpose nothing" after she "pricked thee out for women's pleasure." Critics looking for firm evidence for or against the sonnets' homoeroticism point to the prick as definitive proof, one way or the other. Joseph Pequigney, for instance, turns to the speaker's fascination with "the 'thing' that was 'prick'd out,'" to suggest that "such attention in itself might well argue something other than

lack of interest in this organ.”⁶⁹ Alan Sinfield suggests that “the Poet” expresses a sudden fixation on this “male sex organ” not because he is fending off homoerotic desire writ large, but as part of a spat over sexual versatility: “the Boy” must have scandalously offered to penetrate the Poet in an “off-stage action” that the readers should intuit.⁷⁰ Richard Halpern understands the sonnet as a sodomitical exposé that he not unproblematically aligns with *The Crying Game*.⁷¹ Stephen Booth, by contrast, erects the prick as an insurmountable obstacle to sexual desire since “nature’s addition is useless for the speaker’s male purpose.”⁷² According to critical consensus, then, the sestet unwraps a fleshy appendage that fixes the meaning of the beloved’s body with an indisputable finality. Faces can be painted, waists cinched, and brows plucked, but genitals remain fixed and immutable. In this sense, the prick of the final couplet purports to rescue us from the ambiguity, deception, and instability of the technical practices embedded in gilding and hewing. The existence of a penis determines the master-mistress’s gender which, in turn, clarifies the kind of desire that the youth inspires in the ‘Poet’ as either homoerotic or platonic. From this perspective, lifting the skirt for a salacious peek offers concrete evidence for a “real,” God-given gender that is only imperfectly disguised beneath the “artificial” mask produced through technical innovations.

This reading, however, might concede too much to the prick. After all, the sonnet does not actually present us with the prick but rather with *pricking*, an activity that opens onto additional scenes of technical assembly. If the sonnet begins by hailing Nature as a master artist, catching her in the act of pricking loops back to situate two scenes of collective labor and material fabrication that the remainder of this chapter will explore: the aristocratic closet where women engaged in the prick-work of embroidery and the *bottega* or workshop where the Renaissance artist and his apprentices collaboratively crafted masterworks. In the context of the *bottega*, pricking would have signaled a variety of creative enterprise characteristic to fresco painting, a step in the *spolvero* technique of pouncing and tracing.⁷³ The first stage of constructing a fresco entailed the production of a cartoon, a drawing that sketched out the major figures in a composition. Once completed, the cartoon would be cut into smaller pieces, roughly the size of a single *giornata*, a section of the painting that could be completed with one day’s labor. Each morning, that day’s fragment of the cartoon would be tacked onto the wall, overlaid on the *intonaco*, the final and finest layer of plaster. Subsequently, the drawing was transferred to the wall by punching holes through the paper with a stylus, which might also be employed to carve fine incisions along the lines of the drawing. Once “pricked,” the design was dusted with chalk or graphite powder. This procedure would leave an

outline over which the artist and assistants could apply subsequent layers of paint, a suspension of pigment in lime slake. The following day, the process would repeat. Aligning the new *giornata* with the completed portions and modulating the design to account for any idiosyncrasies in the prepared wall was a fiddly and time-consuming affair. In order to coordinate and suture the sections without distorting the overall design, the artist and assistants would gouge reference marks into the plaster, joining the prick-marks and nail holes with a host of horizon lines and orthogonals, arrows and dots, circles and crosses.⁷⁴ While such marks were intended to be covered over by the finished painting, some remain perceptible in completed works while others linger beneath the surface, discernible only through raking light, X-radiography, and infrared photography. The finished fresco, then, may appear to be cohesive design perfectly conceived in the mind of a godlike maker, but such completeness is illusory: technical photography reveals that beneath the elegant surface lies a patchwork assemblage of preliminary sketches, plaster sections, and improvised gashes that tell the story of the painting’s material genesis. In this sense, pricking does not speak to a singular moment of artistic creation. Rather, the technique invoked by the sonnet’s couplet testifies to a protracted and collaborative scene of composition that necessarily entailed adjustments, fine-tunings, and improvised quick fixes.

Moreover, the technical procedure of pricking tended to fracture the unity of the creator-genius. The lengthy process involved in creating a fresco, from drafting and transferring to painting, entailed a collective effort requiring multiple hands working independently. With the advent of the *spolvero* method in the mid-fifteenth century, the design work no longer needed to happen rapidly on-site. Instead, the composition could be sketched out at a comfortable pace in the collaborative environment of the workshop. Indeed, as Marcia Hall notes, by allowing for greater “refinement in the differentiation of tasks,” the technical procedure of cartooning expanded the size of *botteghe* and greatly increased their organizational complexity.⁷⁵ Artistic creation was no longer the exclusive purview of the master artist charged with painting the major figures, along with an assortment of heads and the hands. The fresco also depended on the labor and contributions of the *cartolai* who laid out, flattened, and squared the sheets of the cartoon; the *garzoni* who glued the sheets together, ground the pigments, and occasionally modeled; the *muratori* who prepared the wall; and the *collaboratori* who painted the background and minor figures and less erotically charged body parts. The addition of pricking to the fresco process meant that more voices, not fewer, were involved in the design and execution of a painting. Furthermore, cartooning allowed

for developments in sales and marketing. As a method of design transfer, the technology of pricking meant that those same assistants could handily produce copies and variants as a side hustle, selling ready-made designs for a lower price than a commission. Thus, as Carmen Bambach argues, the pricked cartoon gestured toward a replicative technology employed not by accomplished artists but by “drones incapable of *inventione*.”⁷⁶ Adding further complications, as a counterfeiting technique the *spolvero* method confused the evidence of sole authorship, frustrating efforts to isolate and identify the hand of the master. Even a signed painting took on different and obscure meanings, not necessarily signifying that the work had been completed by the artist alone. Indeed, it might mean precisely the opposite: Tintoretto, for instance, appears to have only signed works produced by his *bottega*. In such a case, the signature means only that the master “assumed responsibility” for the craftsmanship and quality of the art object.⁷⁷ Given the fact of multiple authorship and workshop production, Bruce Cole claims that the fresco was the “quintessential product of the collaborative system that is Renaissance art.”⁷⁸ This practice somewhat abated the aura of the finished product compared with “the golden age of the fresco” when “inspiration and genius crackled as the artist stood facing the blank wall.”⁷⁹ Pouncing greatly simplified the artistic endeavor by parsing it out into delimited tasks that could be completed by apprentices, but that simplification came at the cost of a certain “crackling” virtuosity. That is to say, the cartoon was a technical development that pressed the business of artistic creation away from the unparalleled male genius and toward a flexible, adaptive practice of shared labor parceled out among skilled workers. As such, when Shakespeare sets Nature to pricking, he disrupts the poem’s initial efforts to establish the youth’s face as the product of the artist’s “own hand,” thus elevating it as the singular invention of a divinely inspired artist.

In this sense, the cartooned body upends the assumptions underwriting the anti-cosmetic impulse that dominates the octave, in which the speaker tries to ferret out the gap between the youth’s superficial femininity and the pricked-out body it disguises. In the Renaissance workshop, there was not a clean, binary distinction between surface and interior: painting with a cartoon was a process of accumulation in which multiple layers of pigment, paper, plaster, oils, quicklime, and chalk interact in a blend of physical media. Hardly the decisive moment, pricking is merely one step in a durational process that would necessarily involve adjustments and modifications to accommodate any number of unforeseen circumstances, ranging from environmental factors to directives from meddling patrons or the cost of materials. Likening the creation of man to an apprentice’s hand gouging

out a sketch, then, disrupts the teleological thrust of sexual development as a process that culminates in distinctively male genitalia with the arrival of the prick. Indeed, if Nature is “pouncing” the youth, it is unclear that her “pricking” leads to an unambiguous genital configuration, an extrusion rather than an indentation. In fact, the pricked cartoon is fully consumed by the process of transfer: the sheet, placed on wet plaster and then repeatedly pierced, was torn to fragments as the dotted lines were impressed into the wet, receptive surface. Instead of manufacturing a definitive “something,” pricking a drawing offers nothing more than an outline, an empty space awaiting the gradual accretion of layer upon layer of material. In this scenario, Nature’s pricking is both additive and subtractive: this prick is a puncture wound, only a prelude to the slow building up of the image. Like the perforated cartoon or the pierced sampler, the youth’s pricked body is not its definitive form, but only an intermediate figure, a figure of mediation. Here, Nature is no longer the face-painter of the first lines who traffics in deceptive adornments and gold-encrusted icons. Rather, under the skillful hand of Nature, surface itself begins to take on some depth, pressing the two-dimensional work of painting into the third dimension. In this creation story, the master-mistress—prick included—is surface all the way down, a creature of pure, layered exteriority.

If pricking was associated with the production of showpieces for public spaces, it was also a domestic affair undertaken in the aristocratic closet, where women of a certain rank would engage in the prick-work of embroidery. As opposed to the aesthetic heights and enduring grandeur of monumental art, such pricking generated delicate and homely ephemera like samplers, pillowcases, book covers, ruffs, habiliments, periwigs, spangled headgear, chin-cloths, hoods, and napkins. Where the art world was dominated by a swaggering machismo, the domain of fiber arts was firmly associated with femininity and women’s labor. Indeed, as Ann Jones and Peter Stallybrass note, for upper-class households of early modern England, “to speak of ‘work’ in relation to a woman of high rank was to mean needle-work.”⁸⁰ As feminist critics have long argued, for the leisured class, stitchery was an exercise in the womanly virtues of docility, service, obedience, and self-governance.⁸¹ For genteel women, the purpose of embroidery was detached from merely utilitarian value. Rather, such work was designed for the moral conditioning of young women, above all by serving as an antidote to indolence. *The Needles Excellency* (1630), John Taylor’s popular book of embroidery patterns, praised stitchery as a “mortall enemy to idleness,” a grave sin that could compromise not only a woman’s feminine demureness and sexual purity, but also her whiteness.⁸² Juan Luis Vives’s conduct manual *The Instruction of a Christian Woman* denounces those “idel” Christian

women whose otiose lifestyles liken them to the “women of Perse land, drowned in volupteis and pleasures, syttyng amonge the company of gelded men.”⁸³ Needlework establishes the embroiderer not only as a woman of leisure, whose pastimes serve no practical purpose, but also as a dutiful Christian woman whose continence and discipline make a sharp contrast to the imagined lasciviousness and gender fluidity of “Perse land.” In other words, the woman’s prick or, as Taylor puts it, the only “Pike” appropriate for “Woman-kinde,” is not only a signifier of class, but also a marker of racialized gender, an accoutrement of femininity that shores up the whiteness of the pricking woman.

Nevertheless, the prick of the needle could not neatly separate elite women from their racialized counterparts, the “geldings” given to lives of depravity, because the material culture of fiber arts affiliated luxury textiles with a troubling foreignness.⁸⁴ Levantine and Turkish trade in the 1560s and 1570s brought Byzantine and Chinese silks, Turkish carpets, Persian tapestries, and Indian calicoes to England.⁸⁵ Both the materials and the techniques needed to manufacture high-end fabrics were drawn from outside the borders of England and Christendom. Hakluyt, for instance, requested that Englishmen in Turkey and Constantinople bring back both herbs for dyeing as well as “native dyers of wool and silk.”⁸⁶ Moreover, stitchery itself did not fall exclusively into the domain of women of leisure whose sewing amounted to a frivolous pastime. Early modern textiles required a massive outpouring of the dangerous and grueling labor of sewing, laundering, starching, spinning, spangling, feathering, pleating, pinning, gathering, brocading, and knitting. Such drudgery was assigned to lower-class women whose work fueled informal economies of unlicensed and unguilded labor. Regarding the starched ruff, that famous marker of elite status, Natasha Korda notes that the collar’s “exquisite delicacy, pristine whiteness, and fragile shape distance the body of the wearer . . . from the messy world of manual work” while requiring an endless, ongoing process of labor that was outsourced to working women, especially migrant “alien” women.⁸⁷ Firmly separated from the aesthetic heights of fine art, textile manufacture was, above all, a matter of labor, both the invisible toil of working women and the inconsequential labor of genteel ladies. From this perspective, when the sestet casts Nature as a prick-wielding woman, it reimagines creation as craft, not art. Making gender is not just work, but *women’s* work. Here, gendered embodiment is not the end product of a single act of divine creation but the product of a humble and homespun artisanship that can be undertaken by anyone who sets out to spangle, mend, or embellish. With this possibility in mind, the couplet does not necessarily reference a stable, anatomical reality to contrast with the manufactured face. Rather, prick-

ing makes visible the obscured labor that goes into outfitting, shaping, and contouring the gendered body, which is not given fully formed from on high but handcrafted at home.

Moreover, given its reliance on copying and imitation, the fiber arts are fundamentally incompatible with the concepts of originality, single authorship, and divine inspiration. Just as a finished fresco required the work of many hands, the material culture of textile manufacture depended upon collaboration, timed workflows, task management, and knowledge sharing. The material culture of the fabric arts involved communal labor that ranged from the intimate circles formed by a high-class woman and her ladies in waiting to the all-female workshops of silk spinners.⁸⁸ Moreover, like fresco production, textile manufacture also depended upon design transfer, and in this setting too, the *spolvero* technique paid dividends. Embroidery manuals like Giovanni Antonio Tagliente’s *Essempio di Recammi* (1527) and Alessandro Paganino’s *Book of Needlework* (1527) detail how pouncing could be employed to imprint a pattern onto cloth by punching holes through the ready-made design with a pin.⁸⁹ Pouncing sheets drawn from loosely bound pattern books allowed amateur needleworkers to replicate intricate geometrical shapes like knots, interlaces, and arabesques. Printed collections of ornamented patterns began to be published in the 1520s, a host of little pocket-sized volumes aimed at an audience of female amateurs and craftsmen. These ready-made designs were not original masterpieces with identifiable creators. The patterns themselves were “ruthlessly pirated” and plagiarized from other embroidery manuals and print sources.⁹⁰ Given its affiliation with replication and ornamentation, needlework would appear to belong firmly to the realm of craft, not qualifying as a properly artistic endeavor requiring unique genius and unparalleled imagination. And yet, creative decision-making was part and parcel of hand-stitching as well. Many pattern books included blank pages for the amateur to sketch out her own designs. *The Needles Excellency* asserts that in stitchery, “here Practice and Invention may be free” and, in a memorable analogy, compares an embroidering maid bouncing between patterns and embellishing her needlepoint to a “Squirrell [who] jumps from tree to tree.”⁹¹ Pricking did not entail mindless, mechanical repetition, but spoke to a lively mind capable of improvisation. Instead, as Janet Byrne notes, the sixteenth-century owners of embroidery manuals “tore out pages, pasted or nailed them to workroom walls, fingered, folded, cut, scribbled on them, chalked and pricked them for transfer.”⁹² Turning the abstract pattern into a material object meant destroying, not respecting, the initial design. In order to breathe life into the sketch, it might be marked up, passed around the room, bent out of shape, punched full of holes, and cut into shreds. In other words, the patterns were

not ideal forms that needed to be executed precisely as delivered. Instead, the designs offered a bare-bones template that could be fleshed out in whatever ways suited the craftswoman's fancy.

If pricking does indeed reference the textile arts, then the sestet does not amount to an unveiling that reveals the scandalous flesh tucked beneath layers of powder and lace. Instead, the "cutwork" of stitchery is of a piece with the youth's hueing and hewing. Unwrapping the youth yields only another layer of fabric, as a "doting" Nature stitches together the youth's body like a sampler or drop cloth. In this respect, the sonnet's revised creation of Adam accords with an argument advanced by Jeanne Vaccaro in her work on the trans aesthetics and fiber arts, that stitchery works against the model of surface and depth according to which a "natural" body awaits discovery beneath a manufactured exterior.⁹³ Here, the gendered body is fabric all the way down, a contrivance wrought through a distinctly feminized form of labor. In the place of the definitively male God the Creator who shapes man as His living image, this playfully amended version of Genesis offers us a feminine Nature the Needleworker, a decision with significant consequences for the gender dynamics at work in the poem. If, as anti-cosmetic polemics maintained, the *Deus artifex* personally crafted the human form as a unique masterpiece, then the body feels precious, even fragile, and tampering with its composition can only mar the Maker's design. Here, however, the prick-bearing body does not occupy the place of honor as the singular image of God the Creator, with bodily contours fixed for all time according to divine fiat. Instead, the master-mistress is merely a cambric cradled in Nature's lap, a derivative form copied out of a pattern book and then pricked out, one stitch at a time, by Nature's thrusting and penetrative needle. Out of the museum and into the home: Sonnet 20 wrests the gendered body from the rarefied world of art and places it firmly in the realm of craft, skilled labor, and the micro-political routines of domestic life that comprise *technē*. Treating the body as a kind of craft project restores it to our hands; the fleshy materiality of the body is no longer off-limits behind panes of glass but something to be fingered, looped, stretched, and ripped. The paradigm of pricking, then, renders gender into an open-ended process of slipped edges and dropped stitches, raveling and unraveling, working and reworking, copying and embellishing, pattern-making and improvising. That is to say, when gender is handmade, it is transitional. From this perspective, pricking does not offer an antidote to the artificially constructed face, nor does it stabilize the youth's gender. On the contrary, the pricked body is itself a pure fabrication, a technical creation that has been transitional and contingent from the moment of its inception.

Just like the rest of the youth's body, that prick is both real and manu-

factured. It cannot be clearly distinguished from other material signifiers of gender, like the false beards, codpieces, and handkerchiefs that Will Fisher situates as central elements of gendered identity in early modern culture.⁹⁴ Unlike the iconoclastic thrust of anti-cosmetic polemic, the sonnet's revision of Genesis refuses to naturalize the prick as a signifier of maleness that could be easily opposed to the fabricated face. For this reason, affirming or refuting homosexual overtones in the sonnets through prick-centric arguments projects a degree of stability and legibility onto the gendered body that the poem itself consistently rejects. Like the Adam hermaphrodite, the master-mistress passes through various states of gendered embodiment that engage with sexuality in complex ways. First fashioned as a woman and for a woman, the youth is both the product and the instrument of lesbian desire, since, as Valerie Traub notes, Nature has "homoerotically fallen in love with her female creation."⁹⁵ As Simone Chess argues, the varieties of pleasure experienced and inspired by the youth can encompass not only homoerotic and Sapphic desires, but also "queer-gender attraction" since the poem "eroticizes and admires male effeminacy and androgyny."⁹⁶ I want to extend this line of argumentation into the space cleared by trans studies, which has firmly detached gendered significance from any given body part. So too for Sonnet 20—whatever this "something" is that Nature plucked out of the youth's body, the speaker is perfectly happy to acknowledge it a "nothing" or vulva. The poem suggests that the addition of a prick expands the menu of erotic possibilities available to the youth's lovers, but it does not necessarily channel that desire into a cisnormative frame. Moreover, as the final couplet notes, the prick was put in place "for women's pleasure," a phrase that we might read in both the subjective and objective sense of the genitive: the prick not only gives pleasure to women, it also offers its host-body the kind of pleasure that is experienced by women. In this respect, the poem leaves open the possibility that the master-mistress remains the woman she was first created quite in spite of her genital configuration. Already outfitted with a woman's face and woman's heart, by the end of the poem the youth also has a woman's prick.

And so, if the poem begins with an entrenched suspicion of artificial bodies, it ends with an embrace of technicity as an essential feature of creation in the first instance. Indeed, the Nature that fashioned the master-mistress exists at a remove from God already, since she is herself a personification of the created world. As Jane Bennett argues, this kind of anthropomorphism often indicates a recognition of "the material agency of nonhuman or not-quite-human things" and therefore works against the anthropocentrism that is "too often bound up with fantasies of a human uniqueness in the eyes of God."⁹⁷ The created world creating the human: this scene

fleshes out the “double plasticity” that Stiegler attributes to technicity, or what Mark Hansen calls “the quasi-autonomy of the technical . . . the transductive coupling of the living and technics.”⁹⁸ Prick or no prick, the created body is prosthetic from inception; there is no unadulterated body upon which transformations are externally, artificially enacted. The production of the gendered body is not something that happens in an instant, aligning its contours with a divine schematic that holds for all time. On the contrary, Shakespeare’s twist on Genesis confounds the dictum in Jeremiah so often trotted out in support of transphobic policy, in which God proclaims “Before I formed thee in the wombe, I knewe thee, and before thou camest out of the wombe, I sanctified thee.”⁹⁹ Rather than representing gender as fixed from birth, or conception, or the hazy pre-conception state alluded to in Jeremiah, creation is an act of technical fabrication or, to be more precise, an ongoing process of technical interventions and modifications. In other words, when Shakespeare sets Nature to pricking, he envisions creation as a form of technogenesis.

In this respect, Sonnet 20 anticipates work in trans studies that seeks to defang the charge of artificiality by reclaiming prosthesis, like Susan Stryker’s “Words to Victor Frankenstein” or other developments in trans studies flowing from the posthuman turn. We might think of Rosi Braidotti, who splices trans identity with Donna Haraway’s cyborg; or the work of micha cárdenas, who binds transgender subjectivity with the extended bodies of a digital and mediated world; or the affirmative biopolitics of Paul Preciado’s *Testo Junkie*, which unspools the natural body in a world of transbiologicals.¹⁰⁰ While this subset of work solicits connections between trans bodies and new, edgy, digital forms of life, scholarship by Mel Chen, Eva Hayward, and Jeanne Vaccaro seizes upon transgender experience in its affinities with animal life, ecological systems, and fabricated materials.¹⁰¹ According to these critical positions, far from removing trans subjects from the natural world, the prosthetic techniques that generate and regenerate trans bodies gesture toward another creation, a queer futurity in which, as Spinoza asserts in his *Ethics*, we do not know yet what a body can do.¹⁰²

There may be something a touch too schematic about how this argument aligns Shakespeare with trans studies and posthumanism only to pit them against contemporary and early modern forms of technophobia. To draw too sharp a distinction between Shakespeare’s technophilia and theology means ignoring how Sonnet 20 thinks with religion. A more nuanced account of the sonnets’ flirtation with technogenesis requires bringing together trans studies and theology in the space cleared by Shakespeare’s version of Genesis. By imagining gendered embodiment as a process, an unfolding emergence over time, Sonnet 20 explicitly bears on the human

in its capacity as creature, a figure glossed by Julia Lupton as “a made or fashioned thing, given its existential urgency by the sense of continued or potential process, action or emergence in relation to a sublime maker.”¹⁰³ The creature is a technical object, made or fashioned but also capable of self-fashioning. For this reason, Lupton affiliates creatureliness with the discourse of virtue, tracking the conditions that allow the potentials or latencies harbored within a creature to flower, and also with the Arendtian concept of natality, “the possibility of beginning something anew,” the “sense of initiative” or “element of action” that is “inherent in all human activities.”¹⁰⁴ Poised just on the other side of the procreation sonnets, which promote such a narrow account of how exactly “from fairest creatures we desire increase,” the master-mistress offers a more expansive vision of what natality might encompass: not only the production of children, but other forms of rebirth, self-disclosure, and transition (1.1). From the vantage opened by Sonnet 20, then, the pope’s view of creation appears as it really is: constricted and immobile, robbed of its vibrancy and vitality. Far from ushering in an “age of sin against God the Creator,” trans people embrace the contingency and possibility that has always been embedded in the story of creation.¹⁰⁵ By celebrating the gendered body precisely insofar as it is a technical production, Shakespeare complicates the anthropocentric move that elevates man to the image of God, which is so often presented as a timeless and universal truth, not by dismissing religion as ideology but rather by fixing our attention on the entangled, chaotic, lively world in which human life is incubated. In the giddy, giggly pleasures of Sonnet 20, Shakespeare invokes a different creation, one governed by an infatuated Nature who crafts a world teeming with animate life in which all bodies are artificial and all genders are prosthetic.