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## Bodies on Display

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Analytical focus on bodies and embodiment has become well entrenched in studies of religion (Bynum 1990; Coakley 2000; Griffith 2004; Baert 2009; Finch 2010; Pinn 2010; Wetzel 2011). And yet the relationship between experiences of embodiment and modes of mediation and representation remains a deflected interest in this field. The papers in this series contribute to this growing concern by interrogating historical articulations of categories of race, gender, and religion through different modes of display and circumstances of encounter, from late nineteenth- to twenty-first-century America. Working from Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's (1998) consideration of the relationship between ethnographic fragments and spaces of encounter as well as Sally Promey's (2001) investigation of the dynamic articulation of viewing subjects within circumscribed spaces, these papers extend the approaches of ethnographic and art historical scholarship into the study of the bodies who populate narratives of American religious history. Taken together, the papers argue collectively that the display of bodies over time—whether in nineteenth-century photographic “tours,” early twentieth-century infant baptisms, postwar televangelism, or twenty-first-century museum exhibits—has better demonstrated the desires and anxieties of curators (a capacious category for those charged with the responsibilities of display, in whatever context) than it has the ethnographic, theological, political, or social concepts and categories that such displays were intended to convey. In these papers, bodies thus emerge less as fully signified fields than as fragments whose meaning is articulated—however provisionally—through the relational dynamics of display.

The disciplined context of the academic conference has confined the following papers in certain ways. They appear largely as they were delivered in November 2012, with redactions only as necessary in the translation from oral to print presentation. Despite their brevity, each of the papers provides a glimpse of extended historical or ethnographic research that ground the common conversation in a robust disci-

plinary endeavor. Still, there is much that remains to be explored. In her incisive response to the papers, the text of which is also included in this publication, Amy Koehlinger pushes each of the authors to theorize directly on the implications for the connections between particular modes of representation, contexts of display, and circumstances of encounter that the paper limns. To this end, she offers some helpful theoretical models, from Erving Goffman (1959) and Marshal McLuhan (1964) to Guy Debord (1994). Certainly engagement with these classical theorists of media, public interaction/presentation, and spectacle would contribute to an increasingly sophisticated analytical apparatus, but I am not yet convinced that these mid-century critiques bring us any closer to understanding the particular dynamics of religion in the sensorial vortex of bodies on display. To put the question bluntly, is there anything in the question or in the papers it generated that is uniquely about religion, or is what we have designated herein as “religion” simply a condition of more diffuse cultural mechanics of representation?

In “Haunting the Streets of Cairo: Visual Habits of the Biblical Imaginary in Nineteenth-Century Holy Land Photography,” Rachel McBride Lindsey focuses attention on visual habits of elision in nineteenth-century vernacular photographs. Challenging contemporary understandings of photography as an empirical instrument, quite frequently beholders were asked to overlook what the camera had recorded in order to see what was “really” there. The visual habits of willful elision were at work in a variety of photographic contexts—from studio portraiture to landscapes—and Lindsey focuses her attention on photographic tours of the Holy Land. Available in a variety of different formats—magic lantern slides, halftone prints in elegant “art-folios,” and stereographs—these views frequently demanded that viewers overlook the people in the photograph in order to see the people and places of the Bible. This visual habit of eliding the photographic contemporary in order to experience a biblical imaginary, she

argues, was as influenced by discourses of American imperialism as it was foundational to the theological implications of photographs of the Holy Land.

Irene Elizabeth Stroud turns attention to practices of exhibiting “the white infant body” in Protestant-endorsed eugenic baby pageants and infant baptisms in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Using newspapers, etiquette manuals, first-person accounts, historic photographs, and other primary sources, Stroud examines the constructions of race and class that these seemingly innocent practices produced and reproduced. She argues that the healthy white infant body, as the immediate product of reproduction, became an important symbol of “successful” eugenic practice. In infant baptism and in American Eugenics Society-sponsored “Better Baby” contests, affluent white Protestant parents conscripted their children into unwitting performances of imagined genetic superiority. Baptismal practice deployed time, space, audience, clothing, and even food to celebrate the idealized white Protestant home and family. In “Better Baby” competitions, meanwhile, often held at state fairs and camp meetings, infant bodies were evaluated “scientifically” using methods similar to those used for evaluating livestock; the winning babies were inevitably the offspring of native-born citizens of Northern European heritage.

In her study of mid-twentieth-century televangelist Kathryn Kuhlman, Amy Artman investigates how the “Miracle Woman” used popular media—first radio, then television—to control her own image. Artman argues that Kuhlman’s deft utilization of television, in particular, enabled her not only to control her own image but also to change the image of charismatic Christianity for postwar American audiences. In addition to crafting an image of herself and charismatic Christianity, Kuhlman also mastered the discourse of elision in order to subordinate her very visible, very feminine body. As a female religious leader, Kuhlman had to contend with the practice of self-negation expected by women in many conservative Christian groups in order to gain any significant degree of power. In other words, Kuhlman had to “disappear” or “die” in order to be a vessel for the Holy Spirit if she was to maintain authority. As an embodied female she could not lead without first subordinating, even denying, her own very visible body.

Martha Smith Roberts brings the discussion into

the twenty-first century with her study of disarticulated, plasticated bodies on display in contemporary Body Worlds exhibits. Her analysis brings together threads of race, embodiment, gender, and the politics of display that have been tugged at throughout the panel by arguing that museum exhibits are one particularly revealing space for researching religious, racial, and ethnic diversity and the ways that tolerance for diversity is propagated in the public sphere. Through ethnographic observation, Roberts investigates encounters between religiously diverse peoples in exhibit spaces—attending both to the production of those spaces by exhibit curators as well as the myriad ways in which these encounters are received and interpreted by visitors—and the understandings of religious diversity that the encounters generate, modify, and refute. Roberts devotes particular attention to the ways that Body Worlds utilizes strategies of representation that generate a spectacle of the bodies of religious others, strategies that strip the body of political and practical efficacy (sometimes quite literally, as in the case of prisoner corpses). Nevertheless, her research also demonstrates how effective use of bodily display can create encounters that overcome differences and prejudices both inside and outside of the exhibition space.

The papers, individually and collectively, chart an important analytical project. And yet, to circle back to Koehlinger’s response, it is imperative for those of us drawn to this avenue of inquiry not simply to articulate a connection between mediation and representation within the relational dynamics of display—we must proceed to conceptualize what this means, in particular, for students and scholars of religion. How might this recognition contribute to historical, ethnographic, and literary studies of religion? Koehlinger provides a useful—if, as she writes, fanciful—metaphor for conceptualizing the analytical problem guiding the panel: “a group portrait, like fourth-grade class pictures but far weirder and more interesting.” If we could somehow assemble a group photo of the different persons who populate our many narratives of American religion—from bloodied Catholic pugilists to beautiful babies to televangelists to Puritan divines to throbbing spiritualists to ring-shouting slaves, among many, many others—what would this portrait contribute to studies of North American religion? More to the point, she probes the panelists, as surrogates for the field, to “think together about how the picture of North

American religion changes when we attend to bodies in all their fascinating complexity." The group portrait, which focuses attention on the bodies of actors rather than their words, is a helpful mechanism for reframing the guiding questions of historical, ethnographic, and sociological analysis.

But the metaphor also draws attention to our own desire to see and to curate—to stage an encounter between subjects and beholders. In short, the fancy of assembly points to the “mechanics and meanings of display” (Koehlinger’s mellifluous description) that the papers work to unpack. Through the image of the weird and interesting group photograph, Koehlinger reminds us that the relational dynamics of display extend beyond historical and ethnographic subjects to include those of us peering in from the outside. The papers here published represent, as they should, a beginning of a conversation rather than a definitive theory. Koehlinger’s lingering questions ring loud and clear. But in addition to probing the role that religious institutions, discourses, and cultures have played in defining the contours and interpretive possibilities of human bodies, it may be just as helpful to look at the mechanics of mediation and the circumstances of encounter in which the concept and scope of religion itself has been defined.

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## Haunting the Streets of Cairo: Visual Habits of the Biblical Imaginary in Nineteenth-Century Holy Land Photography

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In October 1893 sixteen-year-old Ivy Ledbetter Lee stood among the crowd gathered on the elevated rail platform in Chicago. The weather was mild for mid-October—the morning *Tribune* had forecast a comfortable sixty degrees—but Ivy still had a chill run down his spine as he thought about what the day had in store. Four days earlier he had left Atlanta with fifty dollars in his pocket and a brown cloth memorandum pad (Ivy Lee). To pass time on

the rail passage through Chattanooga, Cincinnati, Indianapolis, and Lafayette, Ivy had come up with a list of “terms of interest in Chicago” (Davis 1893, 11)<sup>1</sup> Although the sweltering summer crowds to the Columbian Exposition had all but dissipated, there was still much to behold as autumn’s long shadows crept into the city. After devoting his attention to a smattering of galleries, including the spectacular Tiffany display of diamonds and stained glass, Ivy