

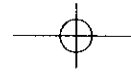
Human beings embody theology despite the Western intellectual penchant for associating theology with thought, not with body. Furthermore, the discourse on definitions of religion—endlessly tiring quarrels that ought to, but do not, establish the foundation for the academic study of religion—reflect embodied theology more than they shape academic discourse. Being bodied, rather than being simply minded, is why such discussions are often so emotionally charged and turn out to provide so little satisfaction. We embody our beliefs so naturally that we are scarcely even aware we are doing so and embodied beliefs are rarely propositional. We do not think our theologies so much as we “be” them. I am considering theology as similar to mythology in the sense of being the grounding for lived truth and reality.

Mind (spirit, soul, intellect) and body are in many ways inseparable despite the ease with which our Western religious and intellectual heritage has prepared us routinely to dualize and hierarchize them. Both theology and the academic study of religion, indeed the entire academy, tend to ignore the physical body while focusing on the mind, yet it must be seen that to focus on the mind remains no less a statement about the body and, even though explicitly ignored, our body practices and habits enact our theologies. The rituals of both church and secular academy effectively show how theology is embodied. In the high mass of the Christian church, we see bodies—principally adult, white, and male—covered with liturgical vestments to such an extent as to render the body inarticulate. These processions of floating heads demonstrate the devaluation and suspicion of the gross body, the body from the mouth down, with the focus directed toward the head, the face. The high ritual occasion of the secular academy is the graduation exercise. Academically garbed bodies—principally adult, white, and male—are rendered inarticulate, demonstrating the same body-mind hierarchy. In these—perhaps our grandest cultural rituals—the robed, heavily garbed body reflects and enacts our deepest cultural and religious beliefs. The body below the neck is suspended and its articulation, its sexuality, its fleshiness, is to be covered, suppressed, denied. Though as academics we study ritual and as religious people we construct

SAM GILL

Embodied Theology

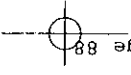
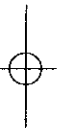
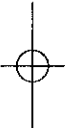
6



While the case I am making is most acute with regard to the academic study of the adjective "religious" to distinguish itself rather than some more nominal form. reflected in the term "religious studies" as the name of the discipline, which uses sively European Christian white males. The proximity of religious and secular is from but a short distance outside this frame, the discipline comprises almost exclu-whelming diversity among the hundreds of figures presented in Capps's book. Yet, within the so-called discipline of religious studies, there appears almost over- book, *Religious Studies: The Making of A Discipline*, is insightful in this respect. From seem barely distinguishable, particularly as they are embodied. Walter Capps' recent different, from the global perspective of the diversity of world cultures these two the perspectives of either the church or the secular academy the other seems vastly to entirely separate religious theology from secular grounds for belief. While from beliefs reflect and affect the lived experiences of truth and reality, it is impossible distinguishes both and arises from a common history. As fundamental embodied mouth. This denial is not only shared, something held in common, by both; it also Western secular intellectual academics deny the gross body, the body below the seems from the failure to acknowledge that both Western religious theologians and necessary by those who champion some objectivity of the academy. The naive intellectual academics, the distancing of explicitly espoused branded theologians felt inction of church-supported seminary studies and state- or privately supported being addressed by this question is the relationship of church and state, the dis- academic study of religion seems naive at best. Of course, I suspect what is really Given this perspective, the discussion of the rightful place of theology in the sen, all else is largely determined.

tion of theory, it scarcely exists for how theory is chosen, yet once theory is cho- theories we espouse. Though criticism is well developed to evaluate the applica- are, by our most fundamental beliefs, than by the propositionally held academic mic studies are shaped to a far greater extent than we acknowledge by who we consciously and reasonably chosen as part of the intellectual process. Our acade- must be understood as theologically based, a reflection of who we are, rather than ther, I believe such theories, because they are tacit in their natural embodiment, ious unarticulated and unacknowledged theories of body held by scholars. Fur- emic research are not simply shaped by, but rather almost fully determined by, var-

As I will show through specific examples, the results of intellectual and acad- Mountains." Colorado's (my university) current advertising sound byte is "Minds to March Our that education is, for the most part, the training of the mind. The University of and an anthropology) that the head (the mind) is superior to the rest of the body, objectivity and disinterest of the academy is based on inherited beliefs (a theology embodiment of them. From this perspective, we must recognize that the supposed the most common of our cultural acts, we are effecting our theologians through our and practice liturgy, though we consider powerful both the study and the practice



religion, I think it holds for the entire Western academy. For the white European male ethnic gender remains the same across the academy.

The battle over the rightful place of theology in the academic study of reli-

gion is rather like the squabbles between Methodists and Presbyterians—it is a big thing only if you are one or the other. And it is on this very point that as a career academic I feel disenfranchised. I chose the academy as a career where I might par-

ticipate in what I believed was the grand humanistic enterprise of understanding others simply for the goodness, the rightness, of doing so without any intention to affect or influence or shape them; to understand them “in their own terms,” as

we so often say. Yet, time and postmodern insights have shown not only the impos-

sibility but also the negative potential of these goals. While most academics now have at least nominally given up the possibility of objectivity and altruism, few to

none have pondered an adequate alternative. To the postmodern challenge, the response has either been ostrich-style retrenchment, or entry into a postmodern

discourse that is too often a hermeneutically sealed community that purposefully gen-

erates ambiguity endlessly. While I chose the university over the seminary because I did not want my work to be based in an explicit religious theology and I did not

want my work to be directed toward proselytizing or even judging my subjects, I have come to see that my work will always be shaped in a determining way by my

embodied theology and the results of my work cannot help but affect, often in col-

onizing ways, my subjects. In choosing the secular intellectual academy, I have

effectively chosen only that my theology remain unarticulated.

I have come to see that much of our work must be characterized as amount-

ing to “preceding simulaera,” to use a term offered by Jean Baudrillard.² That is, the results of our research, seen in this light, are primarily projections onto our

subjects of ideas, concepts, and expectations that we hold prior to our encounter with them. Such preceding simulaera are not so much reflections of the reality of

our subjects as they are hyperrealities, concoctions that, in being almost entirely self-referential, provide their own confirmation. Consequently, if our actual sub-

jects are to have any existence in our world, they are forced to conform to the pre-

ceding simulaera we project on them, thus changing themselves to conform our

projections.

To more fully consider where we can stand in this complex situation is not

my concern here. I have attempted this in other works.³ Basically I am interested in promoting multi-perspectivity, in rigorous and self-conscious comparison, and

in relentless self-awareness. And in the following presentation I want to show that our embodied theologies, though they remain largely tacit to us, determine the

character, the goals, the domains, and the results of the academic works even of those who do not consider themselves religious and who would deny that theol-

ogy has anything to do with their academic work.

It might be argued that this set of embodied beliefs is best referred to as worldview rather than theology. I would not contest this reference, yet I rather like

and welcome the emotional charge carried by the word “theology” because it

Let me begin with aborigines in Central Australia as they existed in the mid to late nineteenth century. Aborigines lived in intimate relationship with the land. They manufactured little in the way of clothing, their housing was but temporary brush shelters, and their tools were limited to spears, clubs, digging sticks, and boomerangs. As hunters and gatherers, they did not plant or harvest. The intimacy of their relationship with the land is evident in both the practical necessities of survival (non-aborigines generally cannot survive the scarcity of resources or the harshness of the climate) and also the identity of the stories that tie their personal identities to tracks across the landscape. The cultures of Central Australia powerfully and decisively shape the bodies of aborigines. Circumcision, subincision (often repeatedly done), nail pulling, tooth extraction, bloodletting, the insertion of bones in the nasal septum, and scarification are done extensively and purposefully connected with rites of passage, social status, and prestige. Diet, absence of protective clothing, exposure to sun and flies and other insects that we consider pests, the work habits of hunting and gathering, and the obvious experience of this powerful landscape all leave distinctive impressions on the bodies of aborigines.

Tony Swain has argued effectively that aboriginal ontology is spatially, rather than temporally, based.⁷ The bodied experience of time, in the sense of experiencing sequences of change, is supported by the experience of marked interval or change. The cycle of day and night, the cyclic lunar phases, and change of aging (birth and death) exist in Central Australia, but there is little else that marks inter-

I want to trace specific body histories to show how bodies are variously and differently constructed and, in turn, how such body histories correspond with and even determine how the world is encountered and seen as meaningful. I will do this in fairly general terms, depending on and extending the detailed study of the history of Central Australia that I provided in *Storytacking*. Here I choose embodied theologues as the category of comparison. I will trace the determining influences of the embodied theologues of a number of figures and groups that encountered one another in Central Australia. This will give us insights about the shape and significance of the often conflicting encounters among these parties, thus advancing our comprehension and appreciation of this fascinating Central Australian story, but more so for my purposes here, illuminating the roles embodied theologues play in shaping human encounters, including those that are explicitly religious and explicitly of the secular academy. The example is intended to provide a base on which to comment further on the relationship of theology and the academic study of religion.

reminds us that all argumentation and value are based in belief that is outside our usual frame of propositionality and that such belief is not universal or simply human, but depends on our cultural, historical, religious, personal, and situational conditioning. Our theologues, because they are embodied, tacitly direct our interests, give us the feelings of conviction regarding our choices, shape the hunches and guesses we formalize as hypotheses, and fuel the passion of our arguments, which are almost never simply or even primarily logical.

vals or sequences of change. Even seasonal changes and weather patterns are irregular. Droughts may last years. Aboriginal languages have few ordinals; they count to three or five. Aboriginal languages are not written. Aboriginals have intimate knowledge of land and particularly tracks across the land identified with ancestors who are seemingly both present and absent. Conception identifies one's body with specific ancestral bodies and with specific tracks of land. Body is land; land is body. Body is ancestor; ancestor is body. Body is story; story is body. Body is community; community is body. Land, ancestors, story, community are all immediate; immediate as body. The individual and cultural bodies of an aborigine are physically molded as these identities are realized. The visible markings on the body and the actions of the body can be easily understood by any member of the community. For example, circumcision marks when a boy leaves the women's camp to begin being molded as an adult of his male skin group. Subincision marks accomplishment of adulthood performed in a ritual counterpart to our graduation exercises. Though less well known, women have their own body-shaping actions, including scarification and body decorations to mark similar cultural values. Though I skip ahead, the reason the lives of aboriginal women are not well known is because the embodied theologies of the European male ethnographers blinded them to the existence of aboriginal women.

Education in aboriginal life is invariably accompanied by pain, the felt pain of the body. There is the pain experienced in the ardors of hunting and gathering in a hot and scarce physical environment but more importantly there is the culturally prescribed pain, which is required to be stoically borne, of surgical and intrusive procedures performed on genitals, skin, nails, and teeth. Aboriginal education is invariably body active and body changing. Learning to hunt and gather is done by performing these tasks. Stories and songs are learned most commonly in the performance of ritual dramas. The land, a counterpart to the community shared body, is surveyed by walking about on it. The world known to aborigines during this period was the world known through their physical experience. Since there appears to have been little interest in origination or in worlds beyond their present physical world, it seems unlikely that much of the knowledge of aborigines could be characterized as propositional or theoretical. The mind is the body; the body is the mind.

In aboriginal life, the body is the principal thing made. It maps the territory and vice versa; it holds and enacts the stories; it maintains tradition and continuity by incarnating ancestors; it marks gender; it marks education, politics, and power. Aboriginal life unfolds as a cultural encounter with the body. The body is central and integral to all meaning in aboriginal life.

Late in the nineteenth century, a group of Lutheran missionaries from Hermannsburg, Germany, entered this Central Australian landscape. As Christians, they held a powerful mind-body duality, considering the body of lesser value than the mind or soul. The body is to be disciplined to support the cultivation of the soul. They were willing to risk body and endure hardship and pain to accomplish

the task of winning their own salvation by bringing their god to the godless. Their god was attached to no land, for he was the creator of the world, the whole world. He existed in heaven, a place sufficiently vague in location as to be equally accessible to all believers, wherever geographically located. The physical world, like the physical body, was understood as but a place of transit, a temporary and dangerous place to be overcome, transcended. The physical world and the physical body were suspect in offering temptation and distraction. Both required careful discipline, measures of control, and vigilance.

These men in black entered the landscape of Central Australia bearded, shod, and hatted. They were accompanied by cattle and sheep. They brought books with them, particularly the Bible. It took them eighteen months to make their first trek from South Australia to their new home. Their bodies suffered the harshness of their mission, which collapsed within a few years primarily because their bodies could not adjust to the demands of the territory.

As Europeans and Christians, their body stories are told in terms of the architecture and furniture they considered necessities. Immediately upon arriving in Central Australia, they set about building. First, corrals were built to hold their domestic animals and gardens were cultivated in the attempt to produce food. Then they built houses to shelter themselves. Their basic bodily needs dictated by their cultural heritage even took priority over their spiritual mission. Once their basic bodily needs were met, they built a chapel and a school, both seen as essential to the accomplishment of their mission.

To bring god to the aborigines meant to bring aboriginal bodies into line with Christian body theology. They clothed the naked. Clothing obscures the aboriginal cultural markings on the body that indicate identity, gender, status, and power. Clothing also served to bodily mark those aborigines who were influenced by Christianity. The missionaries brought aborigines into the chapel to sit in pews to listen to the word of god. In schools, the aboriginal children were taught to sit at their desks to learn to read and write. To achieve the nourishment of spirit, soul, and mind, Christian missionization requires that proselytized bodies be disabled and discouraged through the discipline of architecture and furniture and clothing. The aborigines, it seems, were willing to subject their bodies to clothing and Western architecture and furniture to meet their bodily need for food during times of scarcity. Missions attracted aborigines mostly during times of protracted drought. They also attracted orphaned children, their only full-time residents, who likely would otherwise not have survived. Aborigines understood missions primarily in terms of their bodily needs.

Coincident with the arrival of the missionaries was a stream of European-Australian miners, cattle ranchers, administrators, telegraph builders and operators, and scholars.⁷ They were all Europeans and thus shared a common history of body, although this general history was certainly shaped in various ways by their individual physical, psychic, and occupational experiences.

I want to consider here only those we identify as scholars, for their stories are

most germane to our chosen concern. I want to consider them in two groups: the first is the group of scholars who physically experienced Central Australia—Baldwin Spencer, Ted Strehlow, Gëza Röhheim—and the second is the group who did not—Mircea Eliade and Jonathan Smith.

Baldwin Spencer was an Oxford-trained biologist who was hired by the University of Melbourne to create the study of biology in Australia; Ted Strehlow was born of missionary parents at Hermannsburg in Central Australia and learned Arrente language along with German and English as a child; and Gëza Röhheim was a Hungarian Freudian psychologist who traveled to Central Australia to confirm Freud's positions, as advanced especially in *Totem and Taboo*, and to establish a field of psychoanalytic anthropology. It is not difficult to construct the general theories these men embodied and to articulate their various understandings of the body.

A biologist and an evolutionist, Baldwin Spencer studied aborigines in Central Australia as he did species of plants and animals.⁸ It was during his travels with the Horn Expedition to study Central Australia that in Alice Springs he met the telegraph operator Francis Gillen, with whom he wrote the famous work *Native Tribes of Central Australia*.⁹ Spencer, known to aborigines as "All-day-pick-em-up-pick-em-up," collected, classified, photographed, and sketched plants, animals, and people. His understanding of body was a biologist's understanding. Consequently, he saw aborigines as objects to arrange in given classificatory schemes. Actual bodies were secondary, if relevant at all, to the demands of the general patterns, classifications, and theories forged by such major theorists as James George Frazer and E. B. Tylor. Still, as a biologist, Spencer clearly valued the body, the physical world. He repeatedly traveled to Central Australia to collect not only biological specimens, but also, increasingly important to him, cultural specimens. His collection was accomplished by written description, photographs, and drawings. As a cultural evolutionist, Spencer saw aboriginal bodies as primitive bodies, as specimens representing an early period in human evolutionary history. Spencer was interested in aborigines solely because their physical bodies marked them categorically as primitives. Spencer's world was a world oriented to time. His traveling to Central Australia was the experience of a wrinkle in time, a visitation to human origins.

Spencer's body was an academic's body. He spent most of his life teaching and researching at the University of Melbourne. One of his first tasks in creating an Australian study of biology was to design a building to house such a study at the university. Central Australia was his field for work, a place to visit to collect specimens he took home to study.

Ted Strehlow is distinguished among European-Australian scholars in having been born at Hermannsburg and, having learned Arrente language as a child, he claimed it as a mother tongue.¹⁰ Consequently, though there are detractors, he retains the reputation as the most trusted student of aborigines, a valuation shared by both aborigines and his scholarly colleagues. Throughout his life Strehlow claimed the position of aboriginal spokesman, sometimes even to the

exclusion of aborigines, an exclusion that he justified by comparative body histories—that is, he claimed more bodily experience in Central Australia than some aborigines. It seems clear that Strehlow's reputation is the result of his specific bodily history as much as the evaluation of the scholarship he produced.

Géza Róheim, "an interesting contrast with Strehlow, is routinely dismissed because of the disposition he held, as a Freudian, toward the body. Róheim, in contrast with most other students of aborigines, centered his attention on the sexual body and on the bleeding, suffering, scarred body. Although these body matters are unquestionably important to aborigines, no other scholar gave more than passing interest to aboriginal sex, blood, and pain. No other scholar gave so much attention as did Róheim to children, whom he engaged in a play-based form of psychoanalysis, and to women, whom he interviewed extensively, usually about their sex lives. Because of his disposition toward the body, Róheim's many publications remain obscure and the target of dismissive criticism. Interestingly, Róheim's psychoanalytic anthropology anticipates Baudrillard's preceding simula-ctra in that he understood all field studies and encounters with others in the psychoanalytic terms of projection and counter-projection.

I am arguing that among this group of Europeans who went to Central Australia to study aborigines, their personal and cultural embodied ideologies powerfully shaped the academic work each did, and also have been significant factors in the way each has been valued by the academic and aboriginal communities. The ideologies embodied by each of these scholars were consistent with that of the European or Western intellectual heritage they held, which I will soon trace a bit more, yet each was shaped, even determined, by specific physical, psychic, historical, cultural, and intellectual factors, factors that can be more fully accounted for only through biography and more specific storytracking.

While these scholars differ significantly from one another, they shared the tacit commitment that body experience is essential to their contribution to the academic enterprise. While each tended to reconstruct his subjects unconstrained by his physical experience, as I show in *Storytracking*, each believed that one must go, physically, bodily, to Central Australia, even if briefly, to study aborigines.

Let me turn now to Mircea Eliade's and Jonathan Smith's studies of the aborigines of Central Australia. Neither went to Australia. Because of their stature in the field, I consider Eliade and Smith exemplary of modern education in the West. Their body history is in broad terms identical to that of the Western academy; their history of body is ours. Modern educational institutions have inscribed this attitude toward the body on us all. These institutions have molded our bodies, as well as our understandings of the body.

From the earliest days of school, our children are taught to read and write in a manner that invariably, even necessarily, is accompanied by a discipline of the body. Children are told to "sit still and pay attention," to "sit down and be quiet," to "read silently so as not to disturb others." Writing requires a supported surface and tools—a desk and pencils—both of which limit body mobility. Educational

architecture and furniture are designed to disembody. Classrooms at all levels have chairs. Students sit at desks that confine the body, often by having the desktop fold across students' laps. Desks are often bolted to the floor to prevent disorder and student socialization. Students all are forced to face the same direction, towards the teacher, thus establishing in the body a hierarchy of learning. Teachers enjoy a bit more body freedom, though many cannot tolerate a room without a lectern. Teachers' desks and chairs are larger, likely as much a sign of the status of the learned as a product of the necessity of their more abundant staff.

Books, videos, filmstrips, pictures, and now the Internet bring the world to the bodiless minds of the students. Microsoft advertises "Where do you want to go today?" Or "Who do you want to be today?" The increasing privilege of the mind at the expense of the body changes the body's relationship to space. Bodies need not move to learn; indeed, it appears all we need are eyes and an index finger. Virtual and actual lose their distinction; distance and immediacy are indistinguishable. Universities are rapidly embracing the concept of "distance learning," learning via the Internet, and in doing so, proclaim the utter uselessness of the body to learning.

In the university, faculty members "hold positions" and "occupy chairs." As Elaine Scarry has shown, all things we make are somehow projections of our bodies.¹² Skinny legs, a big seat, and a straight back seem a pretty apt description of the typical academic, all, of course to support the all-important enlarged bespectacled talking thinking head. Stereotypes of professorial clothing styles and personal grooming habits reflect our admiration for bodily neglect by the learned.

Western education has incorporated as distinctive to it the contestability and arguability of ideas, of thought. Thus, we improve our minds, we change others' minds, we criticize ideas, we argue positions. Yet, the body is disciplined, denied, and disabled seemingly without even our awareness, much less our consent. Unquestioned and unprotested acceptance of educational architecture and furniture hugely shapes who we are. It is through these methods of disciplining and shaping our bodies, more so than through intellectual methods of argumentation, that our theologues are transmitted.

Academic bodies are not natural bodies; they are bodies disciplined from their earliest days of school to privilege the head part and to develop agnosia with respect to everything from the mouth down. As I noted earlier, the academic body correlates well with the Christian body. Academic garb differs little from Christian liturgical garments. Both render the body inarticulate. Such garments transform the human body into a cloth-covered pedestal on which is prominently displayed the all-important head, the domain of mind and spirit. In the study of religion, with Christianity serving as the tacit prototype for our definition of religion, it is not surprising that the correlation is especially strong.

Eliade's *Australian Religions* is one of the few general treatments of the religions of aboriginal Australians.¹³ His frequent use of aboriginal examples was important to ground and illustrate his influential understanding of religion. While

Smith did not write about Australian religions in such breadth, his use of aboriginal examples and particularly his criticism and reinterpretation of Eliade's use of aboriginal examples have been important in establishing his understanding of religion and the academic study of religion. "Yet even though Eliade had extensive embodied experience in religious study in India, neither he nor Smith considered it necessary to go to Australia or to have any bodily experience whatsoever to complete their respective studies of aborigines. Though both scholars are accomplished in the study of languages, neither considered it necessary to learn any aboriginal languages. While we must still consider these seemingly peculiar aberrantologies, given the tracking of the various histories of bodies—various embodied theologues—that interest in Central Australia, can we expect anything other than that the body histories of Eliade and Smith have played a major role in what they understood and how they came by their positions and understandings?

Both Eliade and Smith focused their attention on myth texts and ethnographies. Eliade even confused mythic events with ethnographically observed ones. Neither scholar was interested in the extensive bloody and painful genital and body operations or in other bodily aspects of aboriginal life. As I show in *Story-making*, Eliade conceived the aborigines as exemplary of "religious man" in that, according to him, their lives were unlivable should their world center, which gave them access to their god, be destroyed. His presentation of aborigines is not an interpretation of extant sources, but rather is a constructed simulacrum that ignores and is unconstrained by the actual aborigines or even by the ethnographic records he cited.

Smith's interest in the aborigines is primarily in service to his refutation of Eliade as representing a model for the study of religion. Smith focuses on aboriginal myth texts collected by ethnographers. By rejecting Eliade's interpretation of the aboriginal myth as establishing the synonymy of religion and the sacred center, Smith gives a more historically and contextually oriented alternative interpretation. Smith's understanding is certainly more embracing of actual aboriginal life, yet analysis shows that even his alternative interpretation is not adequately constrained by his textual sources.

For both Eliade and Smith, aborigines were reconstructed in text from other textual sources to support the advancement of existing general theory. The physical bodied existence of aborigines is of no concern to either scholar. Aborigines exist as texts, writings, examples, not as bodied people. There is no concern for the flesh-and-blood aspects of aborigines that, one would think, establish the most primary base for authority and authenticity. It seems Smith and Eliade hold the tacit assumption that none of their readers has any interest in actual embodied aborigines. And the broad acceptance of their work seems adequate confirmation.

The distinction I am making here between the two groups of scholars is that one group met the aborigines in the flesh, while the other group did not. I suggest that there are two poles within which the continuum of scholarship is conducted: studies that focus on specific cultures and studies that are broadly theoret-

ical. Though we all know that theory and application are inseparable, that all specific culture studies are theory driven, we still make the distinction and often identify one or the other pole as descriptive of our own work and concerns. I think this division is but another face of the body-mind duality. Works such as Spencer and Gillen's are seen as nontheoretical. Indeed, in their correspondence, James George Frazer warned Spencer to leave the theory to him. Spencer thought he was complying, yet much of his work was actually done at Frazer's specific requests for corroborative ethnographic evidence to support his culture theory and, of course, everywhere is the imprint of his perspective as an evolutionist. Still, in the academy, most ethnography is considered descriptive and nontheoretical, as transparent to the embodied theologies of the ethnographers. Smith and Eliade appear to see their work on Australian aborigines at the other pole, as working primarily with texts rather than people. But it seems to me that rather than holding a view that the texts are perfectly transparent, that is, that they perfectly present the actual people, both scholars were uninterested in the actual people. Rather, both considered the texts, even in their opacity, even in their disembodiment of their subjects, completely sufficient.

In the past, I have argued for a clear distinction between a religious study of religion and an academic study of religion.¹⁵ In broad terms, I continue to believe that such a distinction is important. Without such a demand, the academy is indistinguishable from the church, on the one side, and fiction, on the other. In the terms I have presented above, the religious study of religion presumes a position identified with a particular religion among other religions. This approach both over-determines and inappropriately limits the categories of comparison and the terms of evaluation. On the other hand, the academic study of religion, a child of our broadly humanistic efforts, of our efforts to embrace anew a plural and richly diverse world, must stand lightly and temporarily (a style of standing that does not well suit explicit Western religious traditions) in order to conduct comparative analysis in terms of some self-consciously constructed and expectantly modifiable categories. We do so not to find truth, but to enact who we—determined to a degree by our historical, cultural, and religious particularity—are, who we want to become. What I have suggested in this paper is that while we must distinguish between religious and academic approaches, these positions are finally not separable because the most basic premises of the Western academy are interwoven with fundamental beliefs and understandings of reality—theologies—that are continuous with the more explicit theologies of Western religious traditions. Such theologies inform the very architecture, furniture, pedagogy, and research methodology of the Western academy, which, in turn, determine to a degree far greater than we commonly acknowledge the way we conduct academic business. The necessity, yet impossibility, of making a clear distinction here is what characterizes us at this moment.

There is no place in the academic study of religion for explicitly religiously the-ological positions of any kind, but the entire Western academy—not simply the-

academic study of religion—is shaped by general theological positions that, though tacit, are nonetheless so determining, particularly as they are embodied, that the academy could not survive their eradication.

The question then is not whether theology has a rightful place within the academic study of religion, because the academy is in important ways a Western theological project. The question is rather how theology can be reconstructed and reimagined beyond explicit religious theologies, as perhaps an academic theology, so as to contribute to the challenges of the modern academy, indeed, in the service of embracing the modern plural and diverse world. An academic historical and descriptive theology should contribute to the growing self-awareness of the specific religious/theological conditioning of the academy in all its subtlety and to the descriptive, comparative, and interpretive study of the theological elements in cultural practices of others. An academic constructive theology should endeavor to develop the operative theological positions of the academy, to make them more explicit than tacit, so as to achieve systems of belief and specific strategies of inquiry that invite greater interaction with the world's religions and culture—that create openness to change, modification, and even abandonment; that celebrate the play of interaction—bodied as well as minded—with others in the world; that recognize that our academic efforts to understand others, to focus on such constructed categories as “religion,” and to engage in processes of the mind we call “academic” are but the ways we embody our own theologies.

NOTES

1. Walter Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995).
2. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulations*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1994), 1–2.
3. *Storytacking: Texts, Stories, and Histories in Central Australia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); “No Place to Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith as *Homo Ludens*, The Academic Study of Religion *Sub Specie Ludii*,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, 2 (1998): 283–312; and “Play,” in *Critical Guide to the Study of Religion*, ed. Russell T. McCutcheon and Willi Braun (London: Cassell, 2000), 451–462.
4. See *Storytacking*, chapters 3 and 6.
5. Tony Swain, *A Place for Swingers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
6. See *Storytacking*, chapters 2 and 5.
7. See *Storytacking*, chapter 2.
8. See *Storytacking*, chapter 6.
9. W. Spencer Baldwin and Francis J. Gillen, *The Native Tribes of Central Australia* (London: Macmillan, 1899).

10. See *Storytacking*, chapter 6.
11. See *Storytacking*, chapter 6.
12. Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 244.
13. Mircea Eliade, *Australian Religions: An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967).
14. See *Storytacking*, chapters 1 and 7.
15. Sam D. Gill, "The Academic Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 62, no. 4 (1994): 201-211.