Reality Under Siege
Explorations of the
Creative Role of Difference

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The Poetry is in the Difference
Volume Two

Religion & Study of Religion
Photography
Human Distinctiveness

2024

difference … constitutes the poetry of the map
and the charm of the territory,
the magic of the concept and the charm of the real.
~ Jean Baudrillard, 1981

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Prolegomenon to a Twenty-First Century Theory of Religion[1]

In the Pink? Not So Much

Barbie (Margot Robbie) is given a choice. It occurs early in the 2023 mega-hit movie, "Barbie."[2] Choose the shiny pink plastic high heeled pump or the roughout leather brown flat Birkenstock. Blond flawlessly beautiful thin Stereotypical Barbie, as she calls herself, instantly reaches for the pump. In a previous scene, a hint of a possible existential crisis occurs. While dancing with the other Barbies and Kens in their plastic world she suddenly blurts out "Have you ever thought about death?" instantly killing the dance party until she rephrases, "I'm dying to dance." The omen manifests soon after when Barbie awakens and stepping out of her plastic bed, she discovers that rather than her feet retaining the tiptoe posture that fits her pumps, her feet are flat on the floor. Consulting her friends, Barbie, sticking her bare flexed foot in the air as evidence, tells them, "My feet, my heels, … they touch the earth. I don't walk on my toes anymore." Aghast the Barbies cry, "flatfeet!" One of the Barbies tells her

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[1] This essay, written in 2024, is planned as the introduction to a much longer essay outlining a twenty-first century of religion that emphasizes the importance of the fantastical elements—myth, ritual, theological figures—that tend to distinguish religion. The theory focuses on human creativity and imagination rather than some theological or sacred ontology. The discussion of skill as distinctively human will play a role and my present expectation is to include the long essay in my book *On Skill & Mastery*.

[2] "Barbie" (2023), written by Greta Gerwig & Noah Baumback, directed by Greta Gerwig, Warner Brothers. Barbie movie script: https://transcripts.foreverdreaming.org/viewtopic.php?t=121979

she is "malfunctioning" and refers her to the notorious Weird Barbie (Kate McKinnon) who, having had a similar experience, is now exiled, and seems always in the splits, that is, "noodled." Upon their meeting, Stereotypical Barbie learns from Weird Barbie that she too had spoken of death and that it resulted in a "rift between Barbie Land and the Real World, and [she advises] if you want to be perfect again you have to fix it," otherwise, Barbie will get ugly including accumulating cellulite. Weird Barbie surmises that a girl in the Real World has, in playing with Barbie, likely identified too closely with her. So Stereotypical Barbie, is given a choice "The old life and forget it all or the truth about the universe?" Although Barbie reaches for the pink pump and her old life, Weird Barbie forces her to take the brown Birkenstock. With a quick "goodbye" to her friends, Barbie drives away in her plastic car, that we are reminded has no engine, to the Real World. Ken (Ryan Gosling) stows away largely because it seems, as he says, he exists only as "and Ken" who knows only "beach." The Real World turns out to be Venice Beach in Los Angeles the home of Disney and movies and Mattel toy corporation headquarters, effectively the Mirror World[3] of Barbie Land. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, (1929-2007) who in 1981 wrote insightfully about the hyper-reality of Disney Land (Anaheim) and California, would have chuckled at his prescience (Baudrillard 1981: 12-14).

Before travelling further with Barbie—don't worry I will return; oh, and I assure these travels are leading to my thoughts on theory of religion and its academic study—I need make a couple side trips. The first is to another movie, the 1999 film "The Matrix." Neo (Keanu Reeves) must make a choice between a red and a blue pill.[4] Morpheus (Laurence Fishburne), who has chosen computer hacker Thomas Anderson as a neo-christ figure who will save humankind, explains, "Take the blue pill and the story ends. You wake up in bed and go on with life. Take the red pill, you stay in wonderland and I show you how deep

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[3] This term is borrowed from Klein's *Doppelganger* (2023).
[4] The shoe choice in "Barbie" makes so much more sense to me. I have never been able to keep track of which pill is which in "The Matrix," and the correlation of red and blue with US political parties only further confuses.

the rabbit hole goes. All I'm offering is the truth, nothing more." Unlike Barbie, Neo immediately takes the red pill. Yet the seeming option chosen for both is a wonderland—oh, and we know what classic this word invokes—yet the two wonderlands are imagined rather differently. For Barbie, the only conceivable wonderland is her pink plastic paradise where nothing is real and nothing changes. Yet, in her adventure, the Real World is the land of Venice Beach and theme parks and movies and toys—still plastic,[5] only life-sized. For Neo, the wonderland he chooses is in the roughout brown leather interstices between a virtual reality that appears real to unwitting humans living in it—the illusion of computer code (what appears to be but is not real)—and the virtual world of AI/robots in the post-apocalyptic post-singularity era.[6] In "The Matrix" an actual nod is given to the influence of Jean Baudrillard's 1981 provocative book *Simulacra and Simulation.*[7] By 2023 perhaps it is obvious that there is no longer even an ontological difference between Barbie Land, where on a hilly background is the pink lettered sign "Barbie Land," and the Real World where there appears on the hillside the iconic "Hollywood" sign. Over the quarter century the grungy inter-reality of remnant fleshy humans and their community referred to as Zion has totally disappeared; all has become hyperreal. The main difference between Barbie Land and the Real World seems to be scale. Or to recall a phrase from the much older classic 1984 film, "Buckaroo Bonzai," "No matter where you go, there you are."

Surely it is not mere coincidence that the movie "Barbie" becomes an Insta-mega-hit in close time proximity with the late 2022 broad publicity announcing explosive advancements of

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[5] The word "plastic" is fascinating. It refers to the rigid artificial moldable substance that looks artificial and lasts forever. It is also a way of referring to virtuality of the financial world as a substitute for "credit card." It is also used to refer to the ability to adjust and change based on experience and need as in neuroplasticity. In a sense the movie "Barbie" is about exploring plasticity.

[6] Singularity is the term invented by Vernor Venge (1993) to indicate the time when AI/robots gain greater intelligence than humans and take over.

[7] The book appears as a hollowed out hiding place for computer hacker Thomas Anderson's (Neo's), contraband.

artificial intelligence (AI) and rapidly advancing robotics signaled by the release of free access to ChatGPT. Despite the obviousness of the word "artificial" (duh!) there has been a worldwide obsession with demonstrating that the reality created by AI is indistinguishable from Real World stuff. The products of Artificial Intelligence are indistinguishable from the products of Human Intelligence; Artificial Reality is Actual Reality. Or, perhaps more accurately, *all reality is artificial.* Want evidence? Around a third of the US population supports the re-election even if convicted of and jailed for felony crimes of a four-time indicted two-time impeached reality television personality, a cardboard ugly-wig-wearing President, who led an attempted coup of the US government, stole and shared Top Secret documents, is convicted of financial fraud, is a pathological liar and a trolling violence-inciting foul-mouthed bully to everyone who remotely disagrees with him living in gold plastic looking houses who has spoken of his sexual attraction to his adult daughter (who with plastic surgery looks rather like Stereotypical Barbie and is married to the spitting image of plastic Ken) and has not only been convicted of sexually assaulting women while his trophy wife was pregnant but brags about it in explicit terms ("grab um by the pussy," the phrase surely to be inscribed on the flash drive that will serve as his presidential library) and sells NFTs of himself (Photoshopped as cowboy and astronaut and superhero all he claims to be actual) for a mere $99 each (his scowling mugshot mugs are cheaper). When television and film writers were on strike no one cared because this pumpkin-headed worldwide drama offered new daily episodes of a fantasy reality show called "The News" aired on every channel where the plot is so ludicrous that no self-respecting human writer (or even AI bot-writer, imitating human shame) would stoop to penning it (oh my, this essay seems to be turning rough and brown!). A great many more examples could be easily cited (we regularly chant this long litany), yet clearly the planet is in a crisis brought by the *realiz*ation (does this word still have significance since its root is "real"?) of Baudrillard's hyperreality (Klein's doppelganger Mirror World), that is, a time when the real and the imitation are indistinguishable, when the imitation (if even detectable) often precedes anything pretending to be real and is valued more highly. We discover who we are on social media.

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This long emerging situation was forewarned by the German philosopher Walter Benjamin's (1892-1940) reaction to the rise of movies in the early twentieth century in his classis 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction." It seems to me more than ironic that Merriam-Webster selected "authentic" as its word for 2023.

Barbie's feet. One more side journey I can't resist. Her unexpected thoughts of death are immediately manifested as a change in her feet. Barbie, as a doll offering societal role models for little girls (boys?) is not unlike ballerinas, whose history as live dancing females as well as dolls is centuries long. Both have feet that minimally connect with the earth/ground, surely a sign that they are idealized or perfect beyond real. Both Stereotypical Barbie and ballerinas are thin with exaggerated upright posture. Their bodies have limited articulation. Neither have genitals. They often wear pink and have white complexion. Only later Barbies were given other than pink color and as Misty Copeland has shown breaking the white barrier in classical ballet was difficult and is still rare. Barbie's flat feet—considered initially as a malfunction (reminiscent of the reaction to the bare feet that were in full contact with the floor of early twentieth century dancers, Isadora Duncan and Martha Graham, who introduced "modern dance") surely because, as flexible feet that can stand on their own, they reflect real biological bodies rather than rigid plastic idealized plastic ones. Flexible feet are made for walking and are directly connected with her eventual acquisition of a vagina (with implications! birth and death). Barbie's flexible feet signify her transduction into a biological sexual feeling real woman capable of crying (See Gill 2020b). In a word, "hope." Yet, since she is still living in L.A., perhaps "artificial hope." Who can tell?

As a dancer who has long been obsessed with human self-moving—this moving will be a valued aspect of my proposition related to building a theory of religion and the study of religion—I've looked to both biology and philosophy to appreciate feet more fully. The evolution of human feet occurred copresent and entwined with the evolution of opposable thumbs, upright posture, and big brains all necessary for self-reflective (mirroring, doubling, doppelganger) and self-directed moving. It has been interesting to me—and clearly telling—that

philosophy has rarely focused on any specific body parts. Centuries ago, René Descartes' (1596-1650) *cogito* relegated body to a lower animal role. I find it ironic somehow that philosophy—so concerned with questions of human existence, reason, knowledge, values, mind, consciousness, and language (supposedly the Real World)—has focused mostly on virtual things, that is, the mind (not even the brain), with little interest in the body. I have long found fascinating, if a bit odd, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's (1908-1961) ruminations on his hands—the reversibility of hand touching hand, and the reversibility of touch on the outside and the inside—in his development of what he termed an "ontology of flesh." Chiasm (Merleau-Ponty 1968). His handy work was preceded by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938).[8] In my admittedly tiny philosophical knowledge, I have found French philosopher Michel Serres (1930-2019) to be the philosopher most provocatively concerned with feet (and thankfully the whole body as in his 1999 *Variations on the Body*) often referring to the gymnast and the alpinist (a more fun word than "hiker"). Despite this paucity of concern with philosophical feet, I have been inspired by several philosophers regarding the biological, moving, sensory distinctions of being human. It is to these insights I'll return to offer arguments for a theory of religion and its academic study that is more relevant and interesting for present sensitivities.

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[8] Dermot Moran, "Husserl, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty on Embodiment, Touch and the 'Double Sensation'" *Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy, Second Book* (New York: Springer Publishing, 1989), Maurice Merleau-Ponty, "The Philosopher and his Shadow" in *Signs* (Evanston: University of Illinois Press, 1964), pp. 166-67 and Michel Serres, *Variations on the Body* (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 1999, 2011). Dermot Moran's 2015 "Between Vision and Touch" in *Carnal Hermeneutics* offers a wide-ranging review of history of the connections between touch and vision in philosophy from Condillac through Serres. Much on Merleau-Ponty as well. What is interesting and especially important is the regular hints at the function of proprioception without it being included. There is much here also on hand-to-hand touching … many scholars have focused on this issue. There is discussion of kinesthesia … but even this is not clearly articulated.

"Barbie" and "The Matrix," although colored differently (pink v brown) with one preferring humor the other violence, follow similar paths of sorting out what and who are real and what makes the real. Barbie encounters and foils the male corporate world of Mattel executives (with Will Ferrell as CEO) in black suits driving big black SUV vehicles in an ominous caravan like FBI agents. They proclaim that it is not good (proper?) for Barbie and Ken to be present human life size in the Real World, and they seek to literally put Barbie back in her box, the packaging with appropriately restraining Twiss ties in which Barbie dolls are sold. What is at stake are the concepts "toy" and "play," but also "real" and "authentic." Toy or doll or action figure that "comes to life" in "play" requires the human player to hold as the same—inanimate plastic thing and moving living agentive person (creature)—what is known to be not the same at all, a capability I believe to be a distinctively human trait that I call "aesthetic of impossibles" (See Gill 2023). If the toy plastic doll is present life size and indistinguishable from humans (walking on flat feet and talking for themselves), it is an existential threat, as the Mattel executives immediately recognize. But, as I will show, it is also a threat to the practice of the most distinctive (and authentic?) of human traits. In "The Matrix" Neo and Trinity (Carrie-Ann Moss), his female companion, battle the Agents, dark suit-clad FBI-looking guys, who realize that real fleshy humans threaten the AI code-created virtual world and thus they must be killed ("Exterminate!" in the vernacular of "Doctor Who"). Neo gains wisdom from the Oracle, an old black woman seemingly in a niche (a seedy apartment to me the better sense of wonderland) apart from any reality. Barbie gains wisdom from Ruth, the historical originator of Barbie dolls, something of an oracle who has hidden out on a vacant floor in the "phallic shaped" (as the movie describes it) Mattel headquarters building. Both old women serve tea (ahem!). Neo and Barbie, confronted with disturbing information about a world bent in both cases on removing fleshy feeling humans, persist in seeking self-knowledge, accompanied by the slow rise of feelings, especially feelings of self-doubt but also feelings for other humans. In "The Matrix," achieving the seeming impossible, Neo ("the one") is resurrected from death by Trinity's kiss (she was told by the Oracle she'd "fall in love

with a dead man" and of course Christ was also a living dead man). Barbie befriends the human female to whom, as a doll, she belongs, and she also gains a vagina, yet one wonders if it too is plastic in a wonderland where Barbie Land and Hollywood have merged.

Both films, prescient of the looming AI/robot possibilities, end in a problematic way. In "The Matrix" despite the promise of the survival of humans (AI will not replace us!) Neo, as something of the incarnation of the new cyber-christ who initiates a world in which "anything is possible" flies about as seemingly a character in a video game, countering, to me anyway, the gains won by the retention of the distinctly bodied human. Real fleshy humans don't fly. Likewise, "Barbie" ends with the plastic doll having taken residence in the Real World, itself plastic. She is confronted with having become a real woman who has an appointment with her gynecologist. One imagines she is wondering what her new vagina is for. While the film offers no hints and we don't know if Ken has complementary developments, while we celebrate Barbie becoming a real human woman, we must ask, "What of Barbie dolls? What of Mattel? What of toys? What of make believe? What of play? What of Hollywood? What of Disneyland?" Barbie's Real World is a Mirror World no more real than is Barbie Land. Where Neo winds up making human reality a video game, Barbie ends up as fleshy real woman. While Barbie Land and Hollywood were both created as lands of play and imagination, they have, as Mirrors of one another with no Real World, become ironically (tragically?) worlds without play and imagination because everything is artificial, everything is plastic. They have lost the fundamental difference at play essential to human distinctiveness. The implications of these examples, especially as evident of current mass experience, provide the inspiration for outlining anew a proper twenty-first century theory of religion.

While it would be my joy to give much more attention to "Barbie"—perhaps including a discussion of the common but odd critics' pairing it with the 2023 popular film "Oppenheimer" reflecting on the remarkable contrast between Stereotypical Barbie and the strangely tiny cameo extensively nude appearance in "Oppenheimer" of the actress Florence Pugh who stirred the

world by appearing (clearly an anti-Barbie![9]) in a see-through pink dress and shiny pink platform high heels—my concern here is to set the cultural and historical stage for what I see as an urgent need for a starkly different academic and popular theory of religion and the related academic religion study. The enormous popularity and attention given to "Barbie" and "The Matrix" and AI/robotics and the disinformation foundations of US (and world) politics all share a struggle with classic human concerns, yet now on steroids (and opioids?). What is real? What is artificial? What is appearance? What is properly real? Is anything real? What is map? What is territory? Or to invoke Merriam-Webster's word of the year, What is "authentic"? What is spurious? If we can tell the difference, which is primary? What happens when we can't tell the difference between map and territory, AI and human made, fake and authentic? Does it matter if we no longer even care if there is a difference between artificial and real? Can there be a real without also an artificial? Can anything be fake (or a forgery or an imitation or a simulation or a copy) if nothing is authentic? What about originality and creativity and work? What about imagination and play and drama and symbolism and masks and language and humor for god's sake? How do these questions impact the actual physical world—health, science, climate, safety and violence, politics, governing, race relationships, appreciation (beyond tolerance) of differences? These are existential questions that, I think in the humbleness of my advanced age and as a concerned grandfather, are as urgent as they get. While these are questions for philosophy, they are increasingly confounding everybody. They are also the most practical. Most concerning to me—terrifying actually—is what is foretold at the end of both movies. We no longer see the essential value of difference as copresent with sameness, what Baudrillard understood when he wrote that difference "constitutes the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the concept and the charm of the real" (1981). At a time when humaneness in public life is seriously threatened, when the very existence of the planet and human life is as well, because we have become incapable of discerning the

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[9]   https://wwd.com/fashion-news/fashion-scoops/florence-pugh-dress-valentino-sheer-pink-couture-show-1235499325/

fundamental importance of difference, we either join the movement for purity and homogeneity of every stripe (race, blood, gender, sex) or we stand idly by without comprehension.

Twenty-first Century Theory of Religion

Religions have for millennia offered a prominent arena in life where there is a copresence of quotidian brute reality and the fantasy world featuring gods and spirits in myth and ritual. The copresence was worked out as not only distinctive and acceptable but, for many and I think quite counter-intuitively, as the driving force for the experience of coherence and the basis for what was often referred to as "meaning" (even "ultimate meaning or Truth"!). Increasingly the distinctive difference essential to this copresence has, in the face of the broad cultural collapse and denial of difference, lost its poetry, its force. Religions have, along with so many other cultural institutions, been collapsing into an ever more graying hyperreality or a Mirror World. When everything becomes fantasy, when political leaders become indistinguishable from gods ("orange Jesus"), as the traditional distinctions are blending to the point of indistinguishability and becoming less significant, even ontologically, a theory of religion and its secular academic study suitable to the pervasive reality-situation of the twenty-first century must be imagined anew.[10]

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[10] Of course, this is but the introductory sections of a full development of at least the outlines of the theory of religion I envision. It may shock in that I will argue that it is the implicit differences—the impossible differences between myth, ritual, and doctrine and quotidian reality—that is the source of religious value and power. Further, that the current decline in the practice of religion may be linked to the broad cultural siege on reality that has the effect of eliminating these rich differences.

Imagining a Proper Academic Study of Religion
Inspired by Jonathan Z. Smith[11]

Jonathan Z. Smith is widely acknowledged as among most influential scholars in the academic study of religion in the last half century. His research and publication span many fields and his contributions to theory and to pedagogy have been widely discussed and debated.[12] Smith died December 30, 2017. While a thorough and critical study of Smith's entire body of work does not yet exist, it is certainly appropriate and timely for those who knew him and those who are presently engaged by his work to begin to assess and realize the promise of his legacy. What have been his contributions and how are they valued? Which of his contributions remain actively influential to the study of religion? How might his works remain important into the future? What did Smith think an academic study of religion should be, especially in a secular context? (Gill 2020a). How might we be inspired to realize in the boldest terms the potential and promise of his legacy?

I knew Smith, as teacher mentor and friend, for fifty years and, throughout my career, despite my interests being so different from his and my intellectual capacity tiny compared

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[11] In *Thinking with J.Z. Smith: Mapping Methods in the Study of Religion*, ed. Barbara Krakowicz (NAASA Working Papers, Sheffield, UK: Equinox Press, 2023), 22-33. This volume is the publication of papers presented at a conference in Trondheim, Norway, 2018.

[12] The most convenient way to grasp Smith's contributions is in his bio-bibliographical essay "When the Chips are Down" (Smith 2004); see also (Braun and McCutcheon 2019) and (McCutcheon 2018).

with his, most everything I have done has been influenced by him (see Gill 2019 and Gill 2020). On the occasion of this conference honoring Smith,[13] I take as my mandate the exploration of several points I believe to be foundational to a proper academic study of religion inspired by Jonathan Smith. By the word "proper" I intend a religion study entirely appropriate to a secular environment alongside the humanities, but also the social and even the natural sciences. I imagine this religion study to be important and relevant not only to the cadre of religion academics, but also and even more importantly to the broader public that needs to understand religion in the context of a complex world in constant encounter and conflict.

Now You See Him, Now You Won't

The odd phrase "now you see him, now you won't" is inspired by Jonathan's 2010 lecture title "'Now You See It; Now You Won't': The Study of Religion over the Next Forty Years."[14] Smith's use of the phrase was inspired, as he told me, by his memories as a kid watching the shell game, or three cup monte as it is also called, played in New York City's Central Park. The shell game is not so much a game of chance as it is a scam. The scammer places a shell over a pea and moves it rapidly around among two others. The player is asked to indicate the shell hiding the pea. After several successes, the player places a bet. Watching carefully following the rapidly moving shell hiding the

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[13] "'When the Chips are Down,' It's Time to Pick Them Up: Thinking with Jonathan Z. Smith" hosted by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, June 4-5, 2019. Co-sponsored by NAASR. I wish to thank Barbara Krawcowicz and her staff for hosting this conference and for all those who participated. And, of course, for including me among this esteemed group. This paper is an expansion of one I prepared upon arriving in Trondheim realizing that the one I had prepared and distributed ahead of time was several times too long and was accompanied by over ninety footnotes. That paper titled "The Glory Jest and Riddle: Jonathan Z. Smith and an Aesthetic of Impossibles" is forthcoming.

[14] This unpublished lecture was delivered at the University of Colorado, Boulder, April 2010. It was among his last few public lectures.

pea. Invariably, no matter how careful the observer, the wrong shell is selected, and the money is lost. In a sense the money lost might be seen as payment to the game master for the sleight of hand skill. Smith's selection of this phrase to apply to the future of the academic study of religion is something of a riddle, perhaps a warning. I adjust and adapt the phrase to apply to Smith himself particularly relevant to assessing his legacy.

At the end of his career, I think Smith was less than confident that religion had, through the efforts of the first generation, been successfully established as a proper academic study. The study of religion in secular institutions suddenly expanded due to a statement by Justice Black included in his opinion in the 1963 Supreme Court case that opened the study of religion in the USA to state funded universities. As a result, the number of departments of religion in the USA grew from 25 to 173 by 1966 (Braun and McCutcheon 2019: 55). Smith's fifty-year career, as also mine, coincided closely with the first generation.[15] In a 2010 AAR lecture, Smith called attention to what he recognized as a concern for the future of the field. He said,

> The groundwork, it seemed to me, then [1960s] was there laid for the development of a generic study of *religion*, but that expectation has largely remained unrealized. We seem still committed to the priority of species over genera, apparently confident that a focus on the former is the route to a responsible consideration of the latter without, however, much reflection on how one sort of expertise might, in fact, lead to the other. (Braun and McCutcheon 2019: 126, italics in the original)

Now you see it (religion studies concerned with genera, that is, religion), yet in the future perhaps you won't. Coming out of this first generation perhaps what will remain is but a collection of area and specialty studies, each of value, yet not amounting

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[15] I suppose a generation is thought to be more like thirty years, yet it seems appropriate to consider the first generation of the study of religion to begin with the SCOTUS decision in 1963 (or through the end of the '60s) and to end with Smith's retirement in 2013. I arrived at the University of Chicago as a student in 1967, Smith in 1968 the same year he finished his Yale dissertation on Frazer. Smith had taught at Dartmouth and University of California Santa Barbara by this time.

to a proper study of religion as an important aspect of what it is to be human.

It may well be that the fate of Smith's legacy is, to some extent, entwined with the recognition that genera is essential to a proper academic study of religion. Of course, his many studies contributing to religion specific and technical topics should also long remain of value. Many know him principally for several contributions: his persistent emphasis on the importance of difference in comparison; his detailed writings on the history and technique of comparison; his tenacious emphasis on place as important to both the study of religion and to religions themselves especially as born out in his discussions of maps; and his shocking proclamations that there are no data for religion and that religion, having no independent existence apart from the academy, is the invention of the scholar who must be relentlessly self-conscious.

Will these persistent concerns continue to generate engage-ment and advancement? Will the rich balance of his work be remembered? Will his many books and essays offering complex analysis and profound challenge continue to inspire scholars into the future? While many scholars in the field still know of Smith's work, many may remember him primarily for his several most widely quoted statements, his eccentric physical appear-ance, his entertaining and powerful style of presentation, and anecdotal stories of "Smith sightings" and chance meetings.[16] Should the study of religion continue principally as a collection of area and specialty studies, the present sense of "now you see him" will likely soon become "now you won't." I think this outcome would be most unfortunate given the promise of the remarkable legacy that Smith left the field. Religion, as genera, simply isn't to be found by the continued development principally of species. Without a strong engagement of religion as genera, eventually the various species studies, or area studies, will fit appropriately in other academic fields where they might

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[16] The last three department chairs in my department at the University of Colorado had never heard of Smith; that's partly why I retired. At the NAASR session in November 2018 in Denver, I found it interesting that only a few attended who had known and studied with Smith. There were several others who had interesting anecdotal stories about the single time they met Smith.

be happily relocated: history, language studies, classics, literature, anthropology, and the various social sciences. Religion as a distinct field and discipline will cease to exist. While not a scam artist, Smith is *magister ludi*, showing that what we think we are doing may not lead to where we claim we are going.

It is my goal in the balance of this essay to adumbrate some possibilities for a proper academic study of religion inspired by elements of Smith's legacy.

Glory, Jest, and Riddle

The phrase "glory, jest, and riddle" appears in the title of Smith's Yale dissertation "Glory, Jest, and Riddle: James George Frazer and *The Golden Bough*" (1969). Smith loved jokes, jests, riddles, and play and regularly included them in his writing, frequently in his titles. He delighted in the humorous and playful incongruity, recognizing their power by often leaving them unexplained. I have heard scholars speak and write of their frustration reading Smith by what they say confuses and confounds them. They hold that Smith contradicts himself or is just too complicated and opaque. By not recognizing the jests and riddles, I suggest that some may be missing an important (essential?) dimension of Smith's treasure that may not be where one expects to find it.

Smith loved difference, incongruity, incoherence, the contradictory, the impossible. He said that he chose to study religion because it made him laugh out loud (Braun and McCutcheon 2019: 4); his measure of the presence of certain kinds of difference; the kinds that are impossible to reconcile, those of the cleverness variety. There is something glorious about Smith's penchant for joke and riddle. It is more than a stylistic flavoring that made him an entertaining and popular teacher and lecturer. His teaching at the University of California at Santa Barbara[17] was referred to as the best nightclub act in town. His humor always delivered provocation.

The glory of jest and riddle is that they are tropes by which difference and incongruity are kept ongoing (energized) and in their ongoingness demonstrate profundity. The structurality of

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[17] Smith's residence at UCSB parallels his research and writing of his Frazer dissertation.

jest and riddle is placing together things of unlikely or even impossible difference, comparing them in some respects, knowing all along that the measure of difference makes identity or congruity impossible. We laugh at and repeat, rather than explain, jokes. We marvel that riddles overlay different and incompatible frames of reality and find the results clever in a way that keeps on giving. Thus, the glory of Smith's jokes and riddles is in their initiating an ongoing process, in our marveling at the ongoing play of difference, in our identifying difference and incongruity with vitality and oscillatory movings; infinitely more interesting and engaging than rendering meaning and conclusion.

The richness of Smith's use of jokes and humor deserves a full and careful study on its own. I will briefly consider a couple examples, ones that might not be immediately recognized as riddles or jests.

Smith's Frazer studies occupied him for five or six years. Frazer's work took over twenty-five years. The third edition of *The Golden Bough* had five thousand sources with one hundred thousand cultural examples. Smith read and compared many of Frazer's examples to their cited sources. He concluded, as others already had, that Frazer had no questions and thus he could have no answers, that he made up or heavily skewed lots of his examples, that in most every respect his work was a failure. Yet, in Smith's dissertation after hundreds of pages of devastating criticism of Frazer, he concludes with a section titled "Frazer Redivivist?" that is, Frazer reborn, but with a question mark. There is deep, perhaps also dark, humor here. For all the substance and complexity of his Frazer work, Smith published only one article on it titled "When the Bough Breaks" (Smith 1973). The title invokes the darkest line in the old lullaby "Rock a Bye Baby" and it suggests a riddle as well. In the original publication of this article, Smith writes of Frazer "The *Bough* has been broken and all that it cradled has fallen. It has been broken not only by subsequent scholars, but also by the deliberate action of its author" (Smith 1978a: 239). Yet, in the republication of this article five years later (Smith 1978a) he adds an Afterword which ends "I would not wish 'When the Bough Breaks' to be misunderstood. Frazer, for me, becomes the more interesting and valuable precisely because he deliberately fails" (Smith

1978a: 239).[18] Smith weighed whether Frazer's renowned work must be seen as riddle or perhaps joke, yet he was clear that the enigmatic character itself, its author's intentional failure, was at the heart of what he found to be interesting and valuable. The enormous labor of Smith's study of Frazer and his one publication on it offers its own riddle, or perhaps joke. Rather than our dismissing this challenge as Smith being himself unclear or confused or contradictory or as perhaps him having a problem in his writing, we must recognize that this very style often embodies Smith's deepest insights. Yet we get them only if we watch closely and know what to look for.

Second example. In his classic 1975 "Map is Not Territory" lecture/essay, Smith discusses maps and mapping. After discussing maps where Smith seems to slip-slide back and forth between referring to religions and to religion scholarship he concludes his essay by invoking Alfred Korzybski's statement "Map is Not Territory" yet consistent with his delight in riddles Smith could not resist adding "'Map is not territory'—but maps are all we possess." These words are how he concluded this essay. The obvious: a map without a territory is no map at all. Yet, by means of his riddle, I believe that Smith engages the energetics that should lead us to one of the most revealing and important considerations of what and how we study religion; in a sense it is the dilemma of the academic enterprise itself.

Smith raises the question, the riddle perhaps, of what it is we actually study when what we spend our lives attending to are writings, texts, charts, and maps. Typically, we rely on field working scholars and a variety of travelers[19] to go "out there to the others" to collect and produce these texts. This description or recording requires what I refer to as *transduction*, the operations, like those of the alchemist, that change the physical reality of the world experienced by others into the reality of printed words, the principal object of academic humanities study. Just think of the extent of transduction that must happen

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[18] After spending hundreds of pages documenting Frazer's failure in Smith's Yale PhD dissertation, Jonathan concluded with a final section titled "Frazer Redivivus?" that resurrects and rehabilitates Frazer, yet with the jesting inclusion of a question mark.

[19] Some few of us take this journey and its task on ourselves.

to present in a linear string of words the multi-dimensional richly sensory and complexly simultaneously multi-perspectival reality that we identify as our subject. Smith's enormous task in his Frazer and Eliade studies was largely confined to comparing[20] their written presentation of cultural examples with the published sources they cited, that is, comparing writings to other writings, map to map. He made no effort to hold the worlds of the referenced people, that is, their sensory experienced lived territories, as relevant beyond the primary, or even intermediary, text-maps that claim to chart some real worlds. His "maps are all we possess" riddle arises in our realization that the very character of the academic enterprise is one of engaging maps that propose real territories as subjects, yet maps are often all that are really considered; a Baudrillardian hyperreality "maps are all we possess."[21]

Religion as genera is a mapping strategy for other maps. The riddle, or perhaps jest, is that we tend to claim that what we are mapping is the real world lived and experienced by living breathing people in specific historical and cultural settings. Smith was very clear in not only recognizing this limitation, but accepting it, writing that he preferred "reading as a privileged mode of *mediated* rather than of *immediate* sight or experience" (Braun and McCutcheon 2019: 121, italics in original). I believe that we should find this issue alarming and deserving a great deal of attention. The development and establishment of a proper academic study of religion will require careful consideration of this complex issue that is central to Smith's legacy; what is the subject of our work and what reality do we reference when we study religion in the academy? And what reality is the intended actual subject of our study? Texts and documents themselves or

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[20] I call this aspect of comparison "objective limited comparison" and it is always in interplay with another mode of comparison I call "subjective heuristic comparison." See Gill 2021.

[21] Even the natural sciences follow the same alchemy. They work in labs where they may artificially control the environment and prevent the nonlinearities of reality. Even when they study the real world, the objective is to transduce it into numbers that are chartable and can fill variables in formulas. The very point is to replace experienced reality with information that comprises maps. For most scientists, maps are all they possess.

texts and documents as transductions that offer access to the real sensory historical cultural experiential world of those named as our subject? Isn't much of the study of religion maps all the way down?

Smith's frequent use of riddle and jest were glorious nuggets demonstrating how powerful and engaging is difference and incongruity and that we must be engaged by the ongoingness of this dynamic.

Audacious Pygmy and An Aesthetic of Impossibles

My relationship to Smith parallels his reference to his SOTSOG relationship to Eliade, yet I'm aware of my audacity in suggesting any claim to seeing more than what Smith saw. Better, my hope is but to stand on Smith's slippery shoulders to catch a glimpse of the vistas he found common and to ooh and aah at what they reveal; that and to energize my own work inspired by these provocative panoramas.

In recent years I have come increasingly to ask why I've spent most of my life, over half a century, studying religion when I'm not religious, when I'm embarrassed and irritated every time someone asks me what I do, when I am rather disgusted by many who proudly hold themselves up as religious thus indicating, by some congruence of religiousness and piety, their superiority (a few of them are my relatives). To me the things, actions, behaviors we have commonly associated with religions almost always in some way engage the ridiculously impossible. Myths, rituals, *theos* all break with banal reality in some profound way. Audacious really because these impossibles are often described by those who treasure them as the very measure of Truth and Reality. I think my fascination with impossibles is somewhat akin to Smith's interest in difference and it offers clues as to why I've found persistent interest in the human makings we recognize as religion.

For a very long time I've been interested in play and certainly play pervades Smith's work (see Gill 1998). In play, even the pretend play of children, the fun is in identifying things we know to be starkly different; things we know all along to be completely, even impossibly, different. A stick is an airplane; a block is a truck; an argument is a war. All kids know that what they identify as the same are not, but just don't try to get them to admit it

while they are playing. A god is a human; not. Death is life, even eternal life; not. Stories of cosmic beginnings and endings are set in fanciful places with concocted fantastical characters. I have finally come to appreciate that such identification of two or more things that we know all along are not the same at all is at the core of much of what distinguishes human life; and this impossible identity is a forte of religion. It is the structurality of metaphor where we identify one thing as being another thing that we know all along is not the same at all. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) showed long ago that metaphor is implicit in most language. Language itself is built on identifying sounds and inky squiggles with objects and actions yet knowing all along that the word is not the object or action we insist that it is. Fiction is sometimes described as telling the sorts of lies that reveal the truth. Art is artificial, made up, yet reveals deep insights about reality. On and on. This is an aesthetic, that is a feeling perceiving kind of knowing, of impossibles.

I have come to appreciate that some of Smith's signature contributions to the study of religion engage this *aesthetic of impossibles*. The incongruity of impossibles demands aesthetic engagement. The word "aesthetic" comes from Greek *aisthētikos*, from *aisthēta* "perceptible things," from *aisthesthai* "perceive." The connection with beauty didn't occur until mid-eighteenth century, a connection that remained controversial until late nineteenth century. I like the idea that the impossible things are perceptible as in given some concrete perceivable forms; for example, gods as wise old men in the sky or blue many-armed figures. Thus, I intend the term *aesthetic of impossibles* to mean both the perception of impossible things as well as the appreciation of how amazing (beautiful) our human biological capacity is both to perceive these impossibles and that the holding of impossible copresents is fundamental to human life.

Comparison engages an aesthetic of impossibles. Smith studied comparison persistently throughout his career. His interests in comparison included the history of its use, its typology, and its technical essentials (fuller discussion see Gill 2020a, 2020c, 2020d, 2021, 2023). He often concluded these studies by proclaiming that certain kinds and examples of comparison were unsuccessful or incomplete. Many of Smith's readers have not adequately appreciated that these statements

are more energizing riddle than halting conclusion. His criticism was not intended to preclude us continuing to compare. Many have looked to Smith's most banal descriptions of comparison as his principal model; I think this a mistake. Oddly, many rely heavily on Smith's tiny essay in Kimberley Patton's and Benjamin Ray's collection of essays on comparison. Patton had to do some serious arm-twisting to get Smith to write this essay. True to his style Smith titled it with the riddle "The 'End' of Comparison" purposefully signaled by putting the word "end" in quotation marks. Some have focused on this presentation of comparison because it appears to outline a straight-forward linear technique: description, comparison, redescription, reconciliation (Smith 2000: 239). My sense is that it is a serious error to consider this statement of method the culmination of Smith's consideration of comparison.

Smith's description appears at first to be a clear and complete technical description of comparison as a four-stage academic method with subdivisions within some of the four moments of operation. The shortcoming however is that as Smith presents a description of what he terms the "comparative enterprise" only one of the four moments is identified as the actual act of comparing, the analogical mapping of traits of paired examples. Of the technical details of comparison itself Smith writes "With at least two exempla in view, we are prepared to undertake their comparison both in terms of aspects and relations held to be significant, and with respect to some category, question, theory, or model of interest to us" (Smith 2000: 239). The technical operations implied by this complex process are significant yet left unaddressed. Even here what appears linear is circular; what is the end in the sense of a final definitive statement might just as well be the end in the sense of "do it no more." Even in his style Smith engages an aesthetic of impossibles. We cannot be released from the dynamics of his subject.

Comparison for Smith was used in many ways, yet, to me, his most profound was described in *Drudgery Divine*. "Comparison ... is an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstitution which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary" (Smith 1990: 53). Here Smith

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identifies the playful energetics of calling two different things one, the same in some respect.

Another quick example. As I noted, Smith wrote of maps and mapping or, as I prefer, mapping strategies. Many are familiar with his distinction of *locative* and *utopian* maps; the first seeking perfect identity of map and territory (everything in its place), the second detesting the very distancing idea of mapping. Interestingly, Smith's discussion slips between describing actual religions (yet religions generally, as so far studied, have a strong leaning towards the locative) but also strategies of religion scholars (Eliade being the obvious proponent of the locative). I've read many scholars reference Smith's map discussion, yet rarely do scholars recognize that both named maps turn out to be essentially the same and both are also impossible to actualize in any real territory. No territory no map. Smith explains this conundrum in terms of joke, writing, "The dimensions of incongruity which I have been describing in this paper, appear to belong to yet another map of the cosmos. These traditions are more closely akin to the joke in that they neither deny nor flee from disjunction but allow the incongruous elements to stand. They suggest that symbolism, myth, ritual, repetition, transcendence are all incapable of overcoming disjunction. They seek, rather, to play between the incongruities and to provide an occasion for thought." (Smith 1978b: 309) These traditions, characterizable by application and adaptation, as I see it can only be *all* traditions. The very sense of mapping demands the playful and creative process of application, a process of comparison, a process of transduction, an example of an aesthetic of impossibles in holding two things the same that can never be the same. And this impossibility is its value. Smith sees this strategy of mapping as relevant to the academic study of religion as well as to religions themselves.

In these examples we see Smith engaging the energetics of incongruity and difference as a vitalizing ongoing process. We do what we do because we, both religious folks and scholars, are vitalized by doing so. An aesthetic of impossibles is, I argue, at the heart of Smith's interest and his style.

Dancing Darwinian

I have recently become engaged by how odd it is that I've always found Smith to be so inspiring when our lifestyles and interests have been so startlingly different. For many decades I have been a dancer, studying dancing in cultures around the world, owning a dance studio in which I danced with dancers from around the world and where I taught dancing to thousands. In recent years my interests have broadened to the study of self-moving and movement especially from biological and philosophical perspectives. As he described himself, Smith said his favorite movement was to walk to his bookshelves, perhaps to the library.

Focused on dancing and moving, my studies have evolved towards seeing religion as necessarily being also located in biology and correlating importantly with the philosophy of human self-movings, scant as it is. We must appreciate that our biological and evolutionary distinction among our animal kin is essential to our being capable of an aesthetic of impossibles, the forte of our species. We humans not only tolerate the copresence of opposites, we thrive on them in most every behavior that distinguishes us and in doing so we tap the dynamic generative of our vitality. Our moving human bodies have evolved, among our animate organism kin, to not only have the capacity to hold impossibles together without resolution (and we need thumbs to do that), as in play and comparison and myth and religion, but also that we may delight in this capacity and recognize that self-moving is inseparable from human vitality, that zestful quality of human life we know kinesthetically. We move ourselves; we feel ourselves moving and we can think and speak about ourselves moving.

I find this evolutionary biology located in our hands, especially our thumbs allowing us to grasp and gesture, and our feet that enable upright posture and a distinctively human relationship to the world, and in our brains that enable us to not only experience self-moving as a living process, but also to be self-reflective, self-objectivizing about it.

Dancing, which in most of the world's cultures is often synonymous with being religious, can be appreciated as the exploration of the potential of human self-moving and its celebration given the rather strict mechanical limitations that

accompany human physiology. In dancing and human self-moving we can comprehend the remarkable capacity of humans to sense the incorporeal by means of our corporeal distinctiveness. Human kinesthetics by which one feels oneself moving and having the capacity to be self-reflective about this awareness amounts to what Brian Massumi terms "incorporeal corporeality" (2002: 5). The simple awareness that moving is to be never in any place—thus it would not be moving—is an awareness of a quality that transcends grasping, putting in place, even comprehension. Even the simple going beyond initial place to final place as in map and itinerary and change of location—more associated with movement, chart, map—is the presence of going beyond, of transcendence. I suggest these experiences comprise a biological basis for transcendence, the human body's capacity to transcend itself by the self-awareness of and reflection on the very processes of perception and knowing that accompany body moving itself.

I appreciate that my delight in human self-moving and dancing is an outgrowth of my long interest in and study of Smith's constant playing of themes and variations on difference and incongruity. An aesthetic of impossibles is the sensory experiential component of Smith's remarkable insight into the essential importance of difference and it has become a core component of my interest in moving and dancing.

A proper academic study requires that religion be appreciated in biological and evolutionary terms and in the terms of the philosophy of movement and moving. Such pursuits are, I believe, important to honoring and extending some of the most fundamental insights of Smith's legacy.

In relating these ideas, central to my dancing/moving lifestyle, to Smith's very different lifestyle, I find an opening to understanding more fully his sense of and appreciation for human experience; something that might be easily thought to be alien to his interest (fuller discussion in Gill 2020). Fundamentally, as I understand Smith, difference and incongruity are not so much given by nature, not so much firmly grounded in reason, as they are qualities of human experience. Difference and incongruity arise in subjective experience as aspects of cultural, historical, and psychological perspectives and habits/gestures. Smith persistently insisted that the scholar's choice of

perspective was wholly determinative of outcomes, writing, "the student of religion ... must be relentlessly self-conscious. Indeed, this self-consciousness constitutes his primary expertise, his foremost object of study" (Smith 1988: xi). We might add that the experience of incoherence and the seeking of coherence by the folk who are our subjects of study are fundamental to our comprehension of what distinguishes and motivates them.

Coherence/incoherence and the conditions by which these become distinguished in specific cultures and histories amounts to an aesthetic of impossibles inseparable from, made possible by, the distinctiveness of human self-moving.

Toward a Proper Academic Study of Religion

Smith reported that in his conversations with his colleague and friend Mircea Eliade his frequent use of the phrase "when the chips are down" confounded Eliade. It is another of Smith's gaming references that offers a riddle perhaps. Yet, unlike Smith's usual refusal to explain his tropes, he noted that he told Eliade that what he meant by the phrase was "when all is said and done" (Smith 2004: 1). Smith's death adds a somber finality to this phrase. Added to this darkness is what I believe to be the very real possibility that what currently is referenced as the study of religion—a collection of area and specialty studies, that is, species—will simply be absorbed by other academic fields of study. What is needed is the concerted effort to found and vigorously develop a proper academic study of religion that provides an active and exciting discourse on religion as genera—that is, the discourse on religion as a distinctive aspect of being human—as necessary context for the many important areas of study that comprise numerous species. To realize this proper academic study of religion—one that serves to inform both the academic communities and the public around the world—we must devote careful serious attention to the remarkable legacy left us by Jonathan Smith.

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Smith's Golden Bough
Moving Toward a Proper Academic Study of Religion[22]

Jonathan Smith, when told of the website ratemyprofessors.com, thought it "an awful idea." As one who never used electronic devices of any kind, rarely even a typewriter, his comment is not surprising. He tended to equate it with dating sites. He learned this information during a 2008 interview he did for the University of Chicago student newspaper "The Maroon." Yet, he was delighted to learn that his students' comments appearing on this website revealed their affection for his cane, a heavy gnarly stick with a bend for a handle. It prompted Smith to tell a story.

> Well I'll tell you about this thing because it is botanical. This [referring to his cane] is a rhododendron. It grows from mama, it grows from under the ground, and gets out from underneath mama—that is a parable— and it comes out from underneath. So it's a natural cane. And what I didn't know, from the spindly shitty rhododendron that we have around here, that they grow to this length. ...
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> My uncle—Freud is the only one who would understand this—my uncle had two hip operations and after they were both successful he turned to making canes as a hobby. I mean, to the rest of us—what is he trying to do? I have no idea. He made this one, in a wonderful phrase that I haven't heard used properly since the '60s—he was driving through the Smokey Mountains National Park and he "liberated" it from there. I haven't heard that

usage in—I don't know how the hell he knew. He used to be a YMCA coach. I don't know that they talk about liberating things much from a federal property. But he made three or four types of canes, and now I got one, from his wife who's 95 and said she didn't think she'll need a cane much longer, so she gave me the cane he'd given her. It was a little smaller and a little shorter. It's a two-handed job, this one, like so. [He demonstrates.] But the curve of it is funny to grab with one hand (Braun and McCutcheon 2018: 18-19).

Jonathan Smith had, in his youth, intended to become an agrostologist, a student of grass breeding.[23] His interest in biology along with the fact that he'd read *The Golden Bough* before he started high school, documents his lifelong interest in classification, taxonomy, Linnaeus, matters of place; and also the wonder of a two-handed rhododendron cane that came to be something of a signature for him; his own golden bough harvested illegally from federal property; it was a fine natural golden color. In botany, the word cane refers to either of two genera of tall, perennial grasses with flexible, woody stalks. Like bamboo (also a grass), once harvested (that is dead!) rhododendron becomes rigid and remarkably strong. Beyond biology it refers to a mechanical device that aids mobility, that steadies one while walking, or it might well serve as a fashion accessory. Smith's cane served both purposes, yet the fashion statement was perhaps the more important. A cane is a prosthetic; an extension of one's physical body. A cane can be an emblem, an expression of identity.

While my preference in identifying Smith's cane with cane grass (biology) and with a golden bough (ala Frazer) are based on these being associations from the beginnings of his career, they by no means exhaust associations others have made. Wendy Doniger called it a "crazy stick" (Grieve 2018). Russell McCutcheon referred to it as a "tree-trunk" (McCutcheon 2018b). Kimberley Patton put the cane in the context of

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[23] Smith, "When the Chips," 2. Notably, in Greek *agros* is field, tilled land, so more broadly agrology has to do with soil science. This surely is an interesting grounding for Smith's study of things in place and out of place with the dirt/soil distinction being a favorite.

Smith's critique of Eliade's *axis mundi* as a wobbling pivot, that is, not such a stable center, and she also suggested, invoking an association with his study of the Australian Aborigines, that it was Smith's own "terrestrial-celestial link."[24] Smith's cane surely has helped inspire some to identify him as Gandalf (Colasacco 2018), and Merlin. In her touching tribute essay to Smith, Kimberley Patton suggested that as the wizard of comparison (the academic technique) Smith proclaimed himself as *magister ludi* (perhaps also invoking Herman Hesse's great novel) with, of course, his cane serving as his magic wand. Delightfully, Patton chooses Harry Potter (or rather J. K. Rowling) as her source for understanding wizardly wands, "'The wand chooses the wizard,' Ollivander tells Harry Potter" (Patton 2019). Smith's golden bough, a broken rhododendron branch, had the magic that would have attracted the priests at Nemi and the great Frazer as well. It might well have been interwoven with the exempla on dying and rising kings. This golden bough now attracts our attention as we attempt to comprehend the death of Smith and how we are to continue to follow him.

Frazer's studies of his golden bough set out to resolve the question of why "had the priest of Nemi (Aricia) to slay his predecessor? And why, before doing so, had he to pluck the Golden Bough?" (Smith 1973: 208-12). In this pursuit, Frazer was eventually led to study the dying and rising of kings, sacred murders, the questions of how death is employed to conquer death, and the dying and rebirthing cycles of agricultural cults and practices. As a student of grass, Smith surely found himself on familiar ground in his discovery of Frazer's connection of the dying and rising gods/kings with the dying and rising cycles of agriculture.

Smith's Frazer studies, comparable to Eliade's massive patternist studies, prepared him with vast cultural knowledge and it gave him a kind of experience of everything (he was his own Google and Wikipedia); the sort of knowledge that now

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[24] Patton 2019. Ollivander, we'll remember, ran a wand shop. And, of course, Patton invokes Smith's and Eliade's attention to "Numbakulla and the Sacred Pole" example as important to their articulation and argumentation for theories of religion. And I think Smith much the more interested in the terrestrial.

almost none of us has.[25] He engaged the swath of cultural examples that Frazer spent a lifetime accumulating. His concern was both how Frazer read and presented his primary sources—an engagement of map and territory by comparative text source criticism—and how Frazer sought to organize this whole mess into something orderly and significant—a comparative task establishing taxonomy and classification. Smith asked how Frazer used his sources and what questions (hypotheses) his classification schema sought to address. In his ostensibly technical consideration of Frazer, Smith forged the criteria for a proper academic study of culture in an inclusive frame, criteria suitable for religion studies.

Yet, Smith's work is not simply technically analytical and objectively descriptive. It is constantly comparative from a variety of perspectives. Most importantly, his comparisons serve hypothetic inference; they generate new hypotheses, new questions. They make connections that stun and surprise. I well recall the first time I read Smith's discussion of the Ainu bear hunting practices (Smith 1980). After describing how complex and detailed were the requirements that a hunter had to meet before killing a bear, he makes the most obvious common-sense observation that should the Ainu hunters actually attempt to meet these requirements they would surely have starved. He exposes the obvious double-face; they cite essential rules that they (and we, were we to think about it) know full well cannot be precisely followed. This connection, this perspective, generates important parts of his ritual theory. And in the style of Smith, the title of the essay "The Bare Facts of Ritual" reveals his use of the necessary double-face that I've suggested is the energizing dynamic of comparison and the academic enterprise in its play on the homophone terms "bear" and "bare." In Smith's discussion of a specific cultural practice (bear hunt), he sets forth the articulation of the basic (bare) or stripped-down (fundamental) features of his ritual theory and, in the process, also reflects on what we understand as "fact." Smith's title cleverly illustrates that what sounds identical isn't identical at all,

[25] Except, of course, in the prosthetic extension to the All we, but not Smith, hold in our hands. See Gill "Thumbelina's Severed Head" essay in Gill 2018d.

yet it is in the identity of things not identical that is a foundational feature of ritual itself. The style of Smith's title reflects and enacts his ritual theory.

It is fitting that Smith found and made connections that inspired questions and conversations among so disparate a collection of cultural examples; surprising hints of the sort of coherence that feels poetic, academic gifts somehow appearing in the midst of our incoherent-laden labors of love, or perhaps labors driven by our obsession or acquired habit. Yet there they are, riddles and jests that provoke the ongoing drive of inquiry dropped like breadcrumbs that are occasionally found by the rest of us.

After a half century living the study of religion, I struggle to comprehend why we do this work. Put personally, why have I done it for so long? More so now that I no longer must do this work to get paid, I wonder why I can't shut it down. No one is clamoring for my wisdom and knowledge. I don't feel I have some final answers I must race death to get recorded (and hopefully my bed of death remains still a way off); and I'm not so sure I've had questions, at least the most profound ones, driving my pursuits all these decades. Yet here I am, still driven; even speeding up. I have always felt an urgency about what I do. I've felt plenty of frustration, but also an occasional satisfaction, mostly in the classroom which I now dearly miss (well occasionally). Also, in the magical process of writing; those occasional moments of feeling the alchemist.

What I've experienced as increasingly frustrating over the last couple of decades is that the academic study of religion seems to have lost many of its core concerns: What is religion? Why do human beings seem so bent on engaging these most strange actions and beliefs? How is it that human beings seem to constantly produce such fantastical imaginings and perceivings? More darkly, why is religion inevitably at the center of most hate and violence and inhumanity, yet we continue to insist that it is everywhere good and kind and loving and friendly? Why despite suffering the strife of difference and threat and persecution are many religious communities still able to be friendly and supportive to others, to those outside their communities? Why has this field of study—so expansive and so obviously important to the current world's problems, to appreciating and understanding the

peculiarities and diversity and distinctiveness of being human—
tended to atomize into small ingrown groups of specialists
whose measure of personal importance is generated by and
largely confined to their isolated common specialist (elitist?)
work?[26] How can a proper study of religion provide widespread
influence on appreciating deep divides and seeming insurmount-
able difference? Why can this study not show us the creativity
and importance of difference? Why are religion studies so often
isolating and protectionist? These concerns are but a start and,
to me, in the world we live in today, they seem so urgent that
they must be held in a prominent place among all that we
students of religion do. While I've studied the details of a
number of cultures, I've always found at the core of my work
these most fundamental human questions. Yet, I no longer see
that these broad human concerns are shared by many of my
colleagues. Consequently, I have felt irritated at the isolation of
these area studies one from another and their remoteness from
the urgent broad human and social concerns about which they
seem little interested. These concerns with genus inseparable
from species were foremost in Smith's work and I fear that he
will not be followed as he should be simply because the field has
shifted its energies to, in his terms, a primary concern with
species while generally ignoring how these studies can and might
contribute to the matters of genus. Smith did not believe that
such a study of religion can be maintained.

At the risk of being too programmatic, I will offer for
discussion some of the criteria and concerns (principles,
perhaps?) I believe essential to a proper academic study of
religion. I do not argue that these are directly the views of Smith;
they are not. These criteria and principles and strategies are
shaped by my own experience and my own work on dancing and
human self-moving, on Native Americans and Australian Abor-
iginals and Africans and dancers and movers all over the world.
Yet these concerns are all also shaped by my half century
following Jonathan; being in constant discourse with his body
of work. Hopefully, these comments will also serve something

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[26] I have been baffled that these tiny groups of specialist scholars often
appear hostile to anyone outside their closed cadre who might express
an interest in their work.

of a collecting or gathering, of what I have discussed in other writings, restatements in different and expanded terms. I hope they will inspire others to keep Smith's work central to the ongoing conversation (maybe also my own), to shift focus to include once again as essential the defining concerns of a proper study of religion, and to set forth my own reflections that might engage valued conversation.

Religion as a Proper Academic Study: Principles and Strategies

Human Self-Moving[27]

While likely one would think that a discussion of movement [moving, in the rest of this essay the reader should think the gerund "moving" or "self-moving" when encountering the word "movement"] as it is relevant to a proper study of religion would be at best a subniche—perhaps a footnote in the discussion of the usual occasional mentions of body[28]—yet, I

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[27] In my work, human self-moving [for the Oxford publication of *Proper* I used "movement" rather than my now preferred "human self-moving"] has come to be an overarching and remarkably complex topic, one I have come to consider central and fundamental not only to a proper academic study of religion but also to the remarkable qualities of being human. I plan a much larger and more thorough study that includes not only a fuller development of moving, but also careful discussions of gesture, posture, and prosthesis. See Gill 2022. What I present here are but introductory remarks. The discussion of movement following depends heavily on my 2018a.

[28] I've grown weary of the way these body studies are almost always presented. There is often a shallowly veiled sense of apology and embarrassment as though these studies are somehow breaking with protocol and expectation and will surely be criticized or outright dismissed (and they often are). It takes almost no reflection to recognize that almost all these studies assume (and this is of fundamental importance) that mind, soul, intellect, spirit have unquestioned primacy. This is evident even in the term "embody," meaning "in body," thus communicating that body is the vessel for the essence or what is "real." Embody is the study of the vessel, the jar rather than the jam. Over the decades of feeling every time I encounter body studies this deep sense of frustration and irritation, I have had to either shut up and go away or find language and ideas to express a

think it must be considered first in that it sets the perspective and fundamental principles that will shape the topics to follow; it establishes a strategy, a dynamic field, for the articulation of a proper academic study of religion.

Foregrounding movement—more precisely, human self-moving—presumes that religion is a human study, that religion is a complex of action and behavior occurring in a material environment that is inseparable from human distinctiveness. To begin here foregrounds the common discourse among biology and philosophy and the humanities; it excludes the view of religion as somehow inseparable from the divine (requiring something like religious or mystical insights) or a study of the sacred other (theology).[29] Movement focuses our attention on an aspect of life that is commonly the very marker of life. Movement joins humans with our animate kin while providing ways of distinguishing us among other members in the family of animate organisms. Moving is utterly quotidian, yet almost unfathomable in the wonder of it, that it is even possible.[30] Thus, to frame the study of religion in the context of moving/movement is to locate it in the quotidian, the ordinary, the everyday, the common biology, while also focusing on the wonder and majesty and glory of what is so often taken for granted. Even when the extraordinary is of interest, movement provides a new and dynamic perspective.

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sense of the primacy of wholeness at the outset rather than a wholeness by putting the message in the bottle, the spirit or mind in the body.

[29] I'm coming increasingly to appreciate how difficult this shift is for so many students of religion who are gesturally naturalized to equate anything religious to something they term sacred or other (probably should capitalize) or holy or divine or special as just-so. I believe that this difficulty itself is the result of a historical, cultural, psychological, academic set of gestural practices that have made this identity seem natural, ontological, unquestionable. Yet, I firmly hold, as I believe did Smith, that no proper academic study is possible if this identity is in any way—however implicit or tacit—determinative.

[30] I'm not being poetic or hyperbolic here. I do find it profoundly a thing of wonder that we can move ourselves and to do so willfully, intentionally, and with the capacity of the endless possibilities as explored by dancing. Should it be any surprise that dancing is for me the ultimate demonstration of this human wonder?

Smith's golden rhododendron bough was a prosthetic of mobility; an implement that transcended his physical limitations to support and enable his mobility in his environment as well as to extend his identity and life-force and personality into our hearts.[31]

Philosopher Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's remarkable book, *The Primacy of Movement* (1999, rev. ed. 2011), goes far to help us appreciate the inseparability of moving and vitality and moving and human distinctiveness.[32] She points out that we do not learn to move; moving is not something we are capable of doing yet must acquire. Rather, as animate beings, we come to life moving. Prenatally mothers are assured of the aliveness of their unborn babies as they feel them moving in the womb. A stillborn indicates a newborn that does not move; it is a baby born without life. French philosopher Renaud Barbaras and authority on Maurice Merleau-Ponty notes insightfully, "it is *in living movement that the essence of incarnation resides*" (Barbaras2006, italics in original). While the term incarnation shares something of the nature of the word embody,[33] which I commonly criticize, it seems to me he is here indicating that the carnate (a living bodied being) is inseparable from self-moving. He also writes, "It is quite intrinsic to movement that it does not and cannot arise from something foreign to it; movement is not a mere contingent modality; it is not possible to enter into a sphere of movement if one is not already in it."[34] While this statement is obvious it may take a moment's reflection to fully appreciate. Without anything mov-ing how can moving be initiated?

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[31] In the sessions that honored Jonathan at the AAR and NAASR in Denver in November 2018 I heard many scholars tell anecdotes of their meetings and encounters with Jonathan. I was surprised that a large portion of these stories included a mention of his iconic cane. And it is not irrelevant to note that it was Jonathan's physical appearance, his remarkable presence, that might well have preceded his words, especially the written ones.

[32] As also does Sheets-Johnstone's 2016 collection of essays.

[33] Although isn't it interesting that if we leave off the "in" and its implications of "placing in a body," we end up with a flower! I resist the joke, but I do employ the neologism "carnate."

[34] Barbaras 2010: 105. Merleau-Ponty also made this observation.

Yet, throughout our lives, we certainly learn many kinds of movings; Sheets-Johnstone calls them "I cans." The human life cycle is often articulated as a sequence of modes of motility that mark distinct phases in our journey (note the metaphor based on moving) through life—from creeping and crawling to walking and running[35] to doddering and shuffling, to the cessation of moving that marks illness and death ("rest in peace"). There is a primary connection between moving and living; indeed, an identity.

As I have aged and attempted to maintain a movement-active life, I have noticed that many seem to presume that adding years is somehow interlocked with subtracting range and extent of self-moving accompanied by distinctive postural changes.[36] Of course, there are factors of the biology of aging, yet what I rarely find referenced is that there may also be cultural and historical expectations that impact this behavior. The extent and character of our movement may be as much based on cultural and historical expectation as on biological factors. Is there a possibility that even biological changes that are marked by reduced movement and postural shifts are the result, at least partially, of cultural and historical expectations?

Shared motility connects us with all animals and creatures; yet modes of motility, often correlating with posture (think quadruped or biped), help distinguish animal groupings (species). I am reminded of my several experiences watching the deer dances of the Yaqui (Yoemem) in Guadalupe, Arizona. The dancers wear a deer head on their own cloth-covered heads. The cloth, usually red, shields their eyes. Typically, there is a large group of observers surrounding the dancer and the musicians which means that from a distance one sees mostly the deer head

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[35] There is a golden age of running that begins quite soon after toddling. It is the period in a child's life when walking seems to them so boring and inefficient. No matter the distance, one must run to cross it. I think it not accidental that this is the same time in life when we surely not only learn the most but also are the most eager to learn any and every thing.

[36] I recall while riding on a public bus in New Zealand I noticed a sign that encouraged passengers to yield their seats to the elderly. The sign depicted those silhouette figures common to signs. Elderly was graphically represented as a hunched over person walking with a cane.

with glimpses of part of the dancer's head. The skill of the dancer is in his movement that presents the quality of live deer as experienced in the wild. It is not a precise imitation, but rather a dance emphasizing the kind of movement that includes those remarkable attitudes when the deer holds a posture to listen and look. The dancer captures the quintessential self-movement and posture of deer.

Philosopher Brian Massumi expresses this primacy of movement adding the remarkable connection of moving with feeling when he writes as the opening sentences of his 2002 book *Parables for the Virtual*, "When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact it does both at the same time" (1). Massumi is referring to the most basic distinctions of our awareness, our foundational experience, yet the briefest reflection on the observation leads us to realize just how remarkable it is that we can move ourselves, yet perhaps even more astonishing that we also *feel* ourselves moving. How? I'll get to this marvel.

Given that self-movement is not possible if one is not already a mover, the language by which to describe and comprehend moving is not obvious. We tend to halt and gridify the actual moving in process to account for it; grasping is halting. Renaud Barbaras explored the energetics of living movement using the terms desire and distance (Barbaras 2006). By desire Barbaras does not denote some lack that can be fulfilled or even an emotion really. Desire is how he refers to that living force of moving, of moving on; the thrust of living that manifests in moving. We feel it as vitality; that complex sense of going on while also departing from. Desire indicates a dynamic or tonus or energetics rather than a place. And as desire has a temporal implication, it also has a spatial one, distance. A remarkable, yet obvious, attribute of living movement, as discussed by Brian Massumi (2002), is that it is never *in* any place, yet it always implicates the conjunction of places, if virtual ones. Simply put, if we attach moving to any specific place, it will cease to be moving. Moving is the very quality of not being in any place, neither here nor there; yet moving is also bodied, found in a

grounding context.[37] Moving implicates the living connection of a virtual here with a virtual there. It is always relational; mover in context of moving, here in relation to there. Moving is vectored, directed, valued, and experienced because it invokes this sense of distance, a virtual spatiality. Moving is experienced in terms of felt qualities that are remarkably complex.[38] Moving implies a distance before (or perhaps by being a different mode of reality) there is a measurant; moving occurs in a virtual gap. Given these criteria for the most primary qualities of moving, perhaps helps us begin to understand why, in the context of the study of religion where place terms have been a fundamental means of articulating theory and method and classification and data, movement/ moving has the promise to introduce different perspectives, better strategies, ones of relationality, of process, of vitality, capable of new complexities and insights.

Kinesthesia, the feeling of self-moving, is biologically enabled in proprioception (literally, self-perception), the biology that turns moving and touching (nearly synonymous[39]) into perception and awareness and experience and, yes, knowing. These miraculous gifts that distinguish humans among their animate kin imply a "common sense" (in Aristotle's use of the term rather than Paine's) or coenaesthesis or the awareness, even a reflective awareness, nearly identified with self-moving, with sentience.[40] Our most fundamentally human concerns with life and death would be impossible apart from not only the biologically based kinesthesia, but also and more so the breakover in

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[37] I love contemplating the whole idea of awareness of moving and how we come to that awareness. I took up this issue in some details in my essay "Orphans of the Sky: Outside, Movement, and Corporeal Concepts" in my *Religion and Technology*, 123-34. The essay focuses on Robert Heinlein's classic 1941 novel *Orphans of the Sky.*

[38] Rudolf Laban and F. C. Lawrence, *Effort.* (London: MacDonald and Evans,1947) whose analysis of movement revealed many qualities of movement that can be both felt and observed.

[39] Maurice Merleau-Ponty explored this near synonymy in "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968) 130-55.

[40] Variously Aristotle's "common sense" or *aisthesis*, Christian Hübner's "coenaesthesis," and Daniel Heller-Roazen's "inner touch." Not Glenn Beck's notion. See Heller-Roazen 2009: 137-52.

the human species of having reflective awareness of kines-thesis.[41] The fundamental urgency of matters of life and death are not based in abstract concepts or mere ideas; it is a matter of a felt awareness that my real death and my present life are at stake. This concern with the real death was Smith's revelation of what, at least in part, drove Frazer's great project. And it might not be too great a leap to suggest that Frazer's golden bough was a prosthetic that extended his reach, via his highly repetitive gestural movement, into the world far beyond his physical presence.[42]

Movement is the objectification of moving; the verb made noun, action made thing. We have become most comfortable comprehending and reckoning moving in terms of movement; the track rather than the traveling; reading maps rather than traveling territories.[43] Math and science tend to be concerned with gridified movement, with traces rather than moving in process. We see movement as captured by a line or trajectory from here to there that in being represented as a fixed object permits the calculation of all sorts of things like speed, accelera-tion, and lapsed time. Yet clearly as movement, the vitality, the actual moving, has been removed or transduced into a different form or phase of reality.[44]

Yet, even when we backfill moving as a trajectory across a piece of paper, a route on a map, a journey across a place, an arrow traveling from archer to target,[45] an event, we can compre-

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[41] Kangaroos Don't Kontemplate Kinesthesia.

[42] Following this possibility might give a new frame of reference to the distinction of so-called armchair anthropologists and field ethnogra-phers. The distinction is one of class and quality and extent of self-movement.

[43] Yet, of course, there is a certain traveling of territories when maps are all we have with which to interact.

[44] I believe that there is a moving energetics even of the movement-discouraged sitting scholar suffering kyphosis from hanging head and rounded back in the posture common to reading and writing. As is clear from discussions in previous essays, I believe that the gestural and postural habitations of scholars have a great deal to do with the outcomes, from style to substance.

[45] Zeno's Arrow Paradox is explained by recognizing that it arises from the conflation of movement (being in place) and moving (being in no

hend that moving involves both a here and there that are at once separate and conjoined. A journey traced as a route on a map clearly has a here (or beginning) and a there (or destination) that are different and separate, otherwise no route, no movement. Yet we can objectively simultaneously see the beginning and end points and all those points in between, no moving.[46] The whole process exists at once for us. In movement as on maps, we are *in* all places at the same time and the dynamics of the vitality are diminished, at least transformed; perhaps a memory experience. In contrast, in moving we experience a common presence of here and there while being *in* neither one. While moving, our *here* is never a full presence because, were it so, we would not be moving, we would be located *here*. While moving, our *there* is a not yet, a destination, the idea of destination, a horizon even, present only as destination not as presence in place. As Erin Manning puts it, "movement [what I'm calling moving] is qualitative multiplicity ... becoming toward a potential future that will always remain not-yet" (Manning 2009: 17). The experience of process, the sense of moving, is framed in the common presence of here and there, yet with the experienced implication of uncertainty or openness or transition. And isn't it just this uncertainty (the *is* that also *is not*) that is inseparable from the experience of vitality, of life itself? If there is a presence to moving, it is the presence of uncertainty or potential or openness or possibility. Moving is the experience of the impossible copresence or, in Smith's terms, incongruity or the necessary double-face or the dynamics of riddle or joke.

Yet, we must ask, something so tenuous and non-substantial as process, transition, dynamics, energetics is surely either remarkably difficult to study, since we need to grasp something as our subject, or it actually is impossible, mercurial, elusive.

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place). It foregrounds the character of gridified movement which allows us to hold it in place for analysis, such as dividing the trajectory infinitely. It obfuscates that quality of moving as being in no place, not subject to any division at all. It was Henri Bergson who first described the paradox in terms of this conflation. See Bergson 1990.

[46] I find it helpful to understand this "representation" of moving in terms of Charles Sanders Peirce's theory of signs. The map image is what he called *iconic* in that it allows the whole of process to be represented as present.

Perhaps granting this difficulty as an innovative shift in the field of study (yet calling it anything refutes its advantage) we have no thing to study no subject that will stay still long enough for us to attend to. Patience. Perhaps it is enough to have shifted at least our premises and assumptions with strategies; to do so sets things in motion.

Corporeal Concepts, Incorporeal Corporeality, & Transcendence

In recent decades, the study of religion has included, seemingly as a reluctant afterthought or nod, a niche or limited range of concerns that relate to body.[47] Gender, lived religion, popular religion, practice, ritual, and performance are but a few of the terms that suggest body. Other terms with misleading implications, like *embody,* are now also commonly used.[48] Yet, as we acknowledge the primacy of moving, self-moving, we must realize that both religion and religions are *always already* body.

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[47] I have wanted to contribute to the development of this area of study, seemingly now peripheral to the study of religion. I've published three books in the Studies in Body and Religion Series edited by Richard Carp (Lexington Press) and contributed an article to the new journal *Body and Religion*. At this point it is an ongoing struggle. Several years ago, I had a book manuscript rejected by a major press with the reason given (approximately) that body has nothing to do with religion; religion is an abstract concept.

[48] See Sheets-Johnstone 1999: 310-11, 454, 466-67, 496-97, for her critique of "embody," "enaction," and similar terms. She is even more incisive in her "Emotion and Movement" 1999 where she writes, "the term 'embodied' is a lexical Band-Aid covering a 350-year-old wound generated and kept suppurating by a schizoid metaphysics" (275). The term "enaction" is proposed as the "new paradigm" for cognitive science. See Stewart, et, al. 2010. The term has a history of development that correlates closely with the development of cognitive science. Certainly while "action" correlates well with self-moving, the implications of the "enaction" form need to be carefully reconsidered in terms of Sheets-Johnstone's comments. Sheets-Johnstone 1999b: 310 includes warnings about such compound terms as "lived body" that were introduced by Maurice Merleau-Ponty. I fully agree with Sheets-Johnstone and recognize that finding alternatives to the use of such terminology is far more than just clever use of language; it demands a new and innovative approach.

Moving is bodied, yet *to recognize moving body is not a materialist reduction*. To rise to the challenge of appreciating moving, we must take deeply seriously that moving is a becoming as much as it is a being. Self-moving is always a transcending in the most fundamental, even biological, sense. Our biological design has evolved to be highly sophisticated at engaging, responding to, and creating the environment in which we live. Animate organisms on the most fundamental biological level are designed for self-transcendence; to realize themselves through creative encounters.

Humans are distinguished among their animal kin in having a reflective awareness of and a creative response to the experience of this banal transcendence. Moving, Brian Massumi shows, gives us felt experience of what might be called an "incorporeal corporeality." As he puts it, "to think the body in movement thus means accepting the paradox that there is an incorporeal dimension *of the body*. Of it, but not it. Real, material, but incorporeal. Inseparable, coincident, but disjunct" (Massumi 2002: 5, italics in original). I suggest that the foundation of such common yet squishy terms as spirituality, divine, and ethereal is and can be no other than the extension and implication of human felt banal transcendent experience of quotidian moving. Moving necessarily involves, in Barbaras's terms, distance, but not a distance that can be physically mastered. This present yet always unattainable future gives rise to the notion of horizon. Horizon experienced in conjunction with what Sheets-Johnstone suggested as our first corporeal concept *in* and the necessary accompanying *out* leads to the imagination and construct of some radical other,[49] itself necessarily a corporeal concept.

Moving offers an alternative to the thorny and persistent problem that arises in the common embracing of body as distinct from mind, soul, spirit, even brain. When we begin with this Cartesian distinction, we can never stitch it back together seamlessly.[50] This often-popular effort at re-uniting never

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[49] I think this is what Charles Sanders Peirce referred to as "The Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," *Hibbert* (1908).
[50] I often refer to the impossibility of this strategy with the term "the Humpty principle" because when one begins with the assumption of

achieves more than a patch job accomplished with hyphen glue or slash paste, a kind of Frankenstein's creature.[51] Moving, as an alternative, cannot be comprehended apart from the copresence of corporeal/incorporeal. Moving is body, undivided, always inseparable from world; yet, moving is virtual, incorporeal.

The more important implication of moving as understood by Sheets-Johnstone, Massumi, Barbaras, and others is that the self-moving body has a primacy to the formation of concepts that arise as experienced and feeling kinds of knowings.[52] A host of common concepts—in/out, before/behind, above/below, far/near, left/right to begin the list—are inseparable from the evolved architecture and gestural mechanics of the human body. Sheets-Johnstone argues that *in* is the first concept that we learn (Sheets-Johnstone 2010). Arguably we are not taught the concept *in*; there is not a point in our development when someone explains what *in* means.[53] Such a concept is inseparable from the experience of being a self-moving human body. I take seriously the implications of the corporeality of concepts. One might initially suggest that all concepts, no matter what the topic or how abstract the subject, ultimately depend on the prior existence of such fundamental conceptual distinctions as in/out, before/behind, above/below. Were such a proposition embraced that would be a powerful affirmation of the primacy of self-

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separation and brokenness, it is impossible to put it seamlessly back together. Better a totally different strategy, which is what I believe moving offers.

[51] For a discussion of Mary Shelley's book and creature see my essays "Cursed, cursed Creator! Why Did I Live?" in my *Religion and Technology*, 59-72. I offer another morbid image related to this creature, the post-autopsy cadaver. Not only are the stitchings rather obvious, the potential for moving, for life, is also gone.

[52] Once appreciated, it is difficult to comprehend any concept as purely abstract or intellectual, since all conception is based on living corporeality, that is, the distinctiveness of the human brand of animate organism.

[53] The very idea seems ripe for comedy. Just imagine the pre-school class with the children gathered in a circle on the floor and the teacher saying, "Okay, children today is the day we are going to learn about *in*!" Or imagine the parent changing a diaper saying to the infant "Now sweetie, this would be the perfect time, given the load of poo *in* your diaper that came *out* of your body to learn a new concept."

moving body. Yet, I prefer to go much further in suggesting that, while certainly there are times in life and particular domains of learning (schools) where we learn abstract concepts in a formal way, even those most powerful, affective, and compelling (and seemingly abstract) concepts are learned through fundamental experience of the self-moving body. I find convincing George Lakoff and Rafael E. Núñez's studies of mathematical concepts, *Where Mathematics Comes From: How the Embodied Mind Brings Mathematics into Being* 2000. They argue that high level mathematics are comprised of concepts that are surely the most abstract and independent of bodied experience, even physical reality.[54] Yet they show through the careful examination of many examples that there are fundamental bodied experiences essential to even the most abstract of mathematical concepts.

In religious contexts, some of these corporeal concept knowings might be called beliefs. As gesture, self-movement is also essential to the construction and constituency of identity. Showing that moving is essential to perception, Barbaras writes that "The body is this being that exists in the mode of relationship and comes back to itself—constitutes itself on the basis of its entry into exteriority. The body is a temporal or historical unity that creates *itself* against what undoes it through a continual movement toward and within exteriority."[55] Thus, only self-moving beings have a capacity to perceive (with all the subsequent implications such as knowing) with object awareness.[56] Yet there is something of the miraculous in the self-

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[54] I recall as an undergraduate math major while taking a "modern math" course an assignment to build a mathematical system based on the beginning understanding that a straight line be defined as a line that crosses itself in exactly one point.

[55] Barbaras 2006: 144 (italics in original). There is also the Barbaras quote, "only a being that is originally in touch with exteriority is able to discover what is likely to suit it there," yet I can't find the reference.

[56] I am aware that many are interested in the full range of animate beings—animals—even preferring animals to humans in this range. What an emphasis on moving does is to recognize that humans are among the plethora of animate organisms—animals—while offering some means of making important species distinctions. What I'm suggesting here is that humans, unlike other animals, have the capability to have object reflective awareness, or, better, awareness of

transcendent implications of exteriority, of outside. This connection recognizes the primacy of experience, repetition, and a feeling kind of knowing.

Beginning with movement (and, of course, specifically human self-moving), we appreciate that concepts are most fundamentally corporeal, that is, based in self-moving body experiences. Concepts are not simply airy abstract (debodied) ideas that describe or mentally map reality. They are compelling and are held as beliefs principally because they are felt by the self-moving body to be just-so.[57] Transcendence is not something that intrudes into human awareness from some sphere beyond body, the spiritual or mystical,[58] it is an attribute of the genera experience and perception, of the prosthetic extension of

object awareness. Humans perceive objects, as do all animals (even amoebas), yet humans have coenaesthesis (the common sense, in Aristotelian terms), the sense that we have sensory perception. As a fun way of exploring this distinction I wrote a little poem called "Humble Hymn" (2021) in which I created a line for each letter of the alphabet on the pattern of "Penguins Don't Pen Poetry."

[57] I think it clear that even the conviction regarding scientific theory and explanation is based in feelings that they provide explanation and understanding that feels just-so. Certainly, scientists advance complex objective rational data/fact driven arguments, yet surely the enterprise is fundamentally based on this sense of coherence which is feeling based. Otherwise, surely in an environment that is one hundred percent objective and rational (if we can even imagine such an environment) all reasonable folks would have to agree. Perhaps scientists, all academics, propose that the academy exists in such a world, thus the reasoned basis for argumentation, yet for a history of argument, the ongoingness of competing positions/theories, is based on this assumption being a work in progress.

[58] The word "transcend" is fascinating in that it often implicates the non-material other in some terms of the spectral or mystical or *theos*. The word is rooted in Latin *transcendere*, from *trans-* 'across' plus *scandere* 'climb.' The term is thus deeply rooted in the bodied movement terms of moving across or climbing up. It is fascinating that the transcendent, that which has moved across or climbed up, so often loses body in the process. When Eliade invoked the terminology of hierophany, it was perhaps because he wanted to express the idea of the coming into the body from some wholly other or completely non-material plane. Transcend is an appropriate term for a proper academic study of religion so long as its roots to body are not severed.

the self-moving body beyond its physical limitations in acts of creative encounter. The human imagination of the spiritual and the mystical are possible only as constructs grounded in the most quotidian experiences of perception and self-movement, as an imaginative species of the common genus transcendence. This corporeal base for the concept transcendence is evident in the word itself. In the mid-fourteenth century the term indicated to "escape inclusion in; lie beyond the scope of" something. What is escaped, even in the most theological sense of the term, is perhaps rooted in the Latin root *transcendere*, comprised of *trans* "across, beyond" and *scandere* "to climb" thus "to climb over or beyond, surmount, overstep." Rather than some independent abstract non-material other that perhaps reveals itself to human beings one way or another, the very word transcend is rooted in the corporeal concepts *in/out* (escape inclusion) and the self-moving actions of climbing across or beyond or above, all corporeally based.

A proper academic study of religion must have a bodied, even biological, basis for comprehending such notions as concept, transcendence, and the accompanying human concepts such as spirit, essence, numinous, and *theos*. The corporeality of concepts as well as the experience of the incorporeal aspects of moving corporeality offer these bases.

Aesthetic of Impossibles: Play, Difference

On the face of it, the common-sense view of it, religions are a strange and fascinating presence in human cultures, not the least having to do with their patent unbelievability, their forte focused on impossibles, paired with the belief and faith being so funda-mental that the terms belief and faith are synonymous with some religions.[59] Certainly, belief and faith tend to lose their force if

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[59] I don't want this observation to simply go by without considering the full gravity of it. To do so is at the heart of understanding religion and it is also deeply personal to me; part of the question I now ask with the deepest soberness. Consider economics. It has to do with the practical issues of daily exchange and, while it certainly engages enor-mously complex and even philosophical issues, it has to do with money and goods and exchange values and cash and credit cards and bank accounts and the stock market. Its relevance, importance, and value are clear to all. The stuff with which it deals may elicit some specialists

their object is obvious to all. Those aspects of religions that seem so common—myth, ritual, *theos*—are distinguished by the structurality that holds that what is and is presented as foundational (truth?) is not what we know it to be, at least based on the experience of our daily world. Myths are stories accounting for the gods and their worlding acts of creation in the beginning time (a time before time), the very stories on which truth is defined and evaluated, yet we all know that the timeframe is not what we experience every day and how scientists reckon time and the events of cosmic creation; myth time is not Gregorian calendrical time. Yet, a proper academic study of religion must not define itself as comprised of superior intellect, or having special religious capabilities, that might resolve, or explain (away?) these impossibles, to reconcile the differences among beliefs with some academic theology or some trick of discovering a universal truth tucked beneath the wide variations as manifest among cultures. Apart from its arrogance, isn't this kind of effort simply not so interesting?

Jonathan Smith indicated that his interest in religion rests with what makes him laugh out loud. Asked by Supriya Sinhababu why he chose to study religions, Smith answered, "Because they're funny. They're interesting in and of themselves" (Braun and McCutcheon 2018: 4). Describing how he selects the data to study Smith said, "Now sometimes, when I

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to build complex and highly abstract theories, it still deals with numbers and goods. The segment of reality of the subject of economics is banal and available for all to see without engaging anything parallel to the myths and gods and ritual actions of religion. And so too with political science, anthropology, music, dancing, and all the hard sciences. I recall a physics professor talking about things like neutrinos and pausing to ask how it is that anyone could believe in such things. Still, we do because they are accessible equally to all who pursue them. They don't change based on ethnicity and race and country. The thing I'm attempting to articulate here is that religions seem to have as their forte the most wildly imaginative of human constructs as being at least a part of what comes to be the subject of our studies. I'm choosing to make this not some cloud cuckoo aspect of human life, some strange aberrancy that needs somehow to be developed beyond, but rather that it is interesting precisely because it is so crazy so laughable. Jonathan typically said when asked why he chose religion to study that it made him laugh out loud.

break out laughing while reading a text, that is where I want to focus. Because when something surprises me, it also draws my attention."[60] Laughter and inter-esting are species of incongruity and incoherence; they are feeling kinds of experienced knowing.

Yet, impossible copresents, while being, I suggest, a forte of religions, are not limited to religions. I believe an aesthetic of impossibles is a central distinction that appeared in conjunction with upright posture and opposing thumbs and large brains, in the evolution of humans. Language, art, symbols, and metaphor are based on our *capability to hold together without resolution two things declaring them to be the same, even identical, while at once knowing full well they are not the same at all.* The remarkably complex coordination dynamics[61] studies of neurology reveal that metastability (the more technical name for this structurality) not only occurs in creative brain functioning, it is also a fundamental aspect of it. How remarkable it is that the thumb-enabled capacity to grasp an object eventually offers the word that means "to compre-hend, to know"; just contemplate the bodily experiential history in which such an identity arose; just consider how natural it is for us to say that we "grasp a concept or idea" when we know full well that our thumbs are not needed, yet the concept is wholly dependent on thumbs.[62]

Among the most prominent, yet overlooked, aspects of these impossible copresents is that we use them constantly without insisting on resolving the tension of the incongruity; indeed, whether we are fully aware or not, it is the ongoingness of the impossibles that is at the core of their power. Unlike binary computing devices that hang up or crash when presented simul-taneously with opposing conditions, humans in the most

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[60] Braun and McCutcheon 2018: 49-50. Smith's focus on surprise is given a fuller discussion by Charles Sanders Peirce. See my discussion in "To Risk Meaning Nothing: Charles Sanders Peirce and the Logic of Discovery," in my *Creative Encounters*. 2018c: 197-226.

[61] See for example, Kelso1995. There are many others.

[62] For a fuller discussion of thumbs, see "Thumbelina's Severed Head" in my *Religion and Technology*.

ordinary of fashion thrive on them.[63] This is why I invoke the phrase *aesthetic of impossibles* as a label.

I choose the term *aesthetic* with reason. While the term is often used in the context of the designation of beauty and art, this sense of the term didn't arise until the late eighteenth century. The Greek root *aisthetikos* means "to perceive by the senses, to feel." Thus, the root sense of aesthetic is more like "I feel, I sense, I perceive, I know."[64] It is based in body; feeling, sensing, perceiving. There is a body prosthetic aspect to the term in that it applies to the bodied capacities to extend beyond its physical limitations in the encounter with other, with exterior. To link aesthetic with the notion of impossibles, is to open for consideration, exploration, and sheer wonder that humans are capable of feeling, sensing, perceiving, and knowing that which, in banal terms, in terms of reason alone, has to be identified as impossibles: mythscapes, deities, or the common identification of terms we know to be fundamentally different as we so commonly do in metaphor and art and language and ritual.[65]

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[63] I consider the robot/AI encounter with impossible copresents more fully and in a perhaps more engaging way in Part III: Aesthetic of Impossibles, *Creative Encounters*.

[64] Aesthetic (n.) 1798, from German *Ästhetisch* (mid-18c.) or French *esthétique* (which is from German), ultimately from Greek *aisthetikos* "of or for perception by the senses, perceptive," of things, "perceptible," from *aisthanesthai* "to perceive (by the senses or by the mind), to feel." Popularized in English by translations of Kant and used originally in the classically correct sense "science which treats of the conditions of sensuous perception." It became an adjective by 1798 "of or pertaining to sensual perception;" by 1821 as "of or pertaining to appreciation of the beautiful." Thus, aesthetic should be understood "I feel, I sense, I perceive."

[65] I've often written about play as I find it most importantly and profoundly described by Friedrich Schiller in his collection of letters titled *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). His sense of aesthetics is developed in his recognition of the complementary yet opposing drives toward pure sensory experience/feeling and pure abstract form. He argues that these are impossible copresents; they are paired yet they are always in tension. As one becomes more dominant the other exerts more force. The oscillatory relationship between them gives rise to play and thus to beauty.

I've often felt that the academy is not only stifling, but also dishonest, in its common insistence on answers, on conclusions, on resolving problems, on uncovering meanings. As an undergraduate math major with a physics minor, I avoided literature and art because I was devoted to solutions, to proofs, to certainty. I felt that literature was just so much fuzziness and misdirection; what good could something so indeterminate be? Then I read William Faulkner. How naïve I was not only about literature, but also science. The drive that motivates one through a whole career, the issues and concerns that shape a field of study for long periods often (always?) are an exercise of an aesthetic of impossibles; on the simultaneous impossibility of final resolution with the drive to seek it nonetheless. Most of us know that the most interesting and revolutionary of hypotheses are those that seem the least obvious, the least resolvable. We are drawn, as Smith said, to what makes us laugh, what surprises us.

A proper academic study of religion must develop questions and inquiries that become increasingly rich through their pursuit, on and on, rather than suffer false halts with the dishonest forcing of seeming conclusions.[66] A proper academic study of religion, as its subject of study, is a practice in an aesthetic of impossibles; the rich embrace of the pursuit of what cannot be fully known, of what is transformed as a result of the transduction from a sensuously rich fleshy reality to the sensory-limited reality of print.

There is the experience of impossibles in self-moving; not insignificant since self-moving is inseparable from vitality. The experience of moving is the experience of process, the dynamic orientation related to both here and there, yet with the full presence of neither. We are never in any place when moving and every self-moving is an experience of this virtuality, this dynamic of vitality, this most bodied experience of the force of life itself.

Everywhere that I've encountered religions, their attraction to me is linked to what I recognize as their penchant for exag-

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[66] Ask any undergraduate, and I have done so with a great many of them, if they think the conclusion, they state in a paper they wrote was convincing to them. Almost invariably students say "No, but my professor insisted I have a definitive conclusion."

geration and fictionalization; their practicing an aesthetic of impossibles. While fiction may be said to be comprised of "lies that tell the truth," we might suggest that religions concoct certain kinds of impossibles while proclaiming them to have an originary, an ontogenetic, an ontological status deserving the capital "T" for their proclamation of truth. Religions unapologetically concoct worlds and times and beings that defy sober reasoned acceptance or common sense.

I spent years researching an Australian Aboriginal example used by Mircea Eliade as one of his principal illustrations for his understanding of religion. It was the story of Numbakulla who, after creating the Arrente people and their landscape in Central Australia, erected a pole, anointed it with blood, and ascended it into heaven. This story, we'd call it myth, is linked to a second account that Eliade implied was ethnographic rather than mythic. In this story, the aborigines inadvertently broke the pole and so dismayed were they by their loss of connection with their god Numbakulla that they reportedly laid down and died. While my research (Gill 1998b) shows that both stories are almost wholly the concoction of the scholar's imagination, they nonetheless have an aesthetic of impossibles, as I suggest is distinctive of the religious.

To offer another more familiar example, we commonly understand the categories human being and divinity or god to be mutually exclusive, each one dependent on its exclusion of the other. Yet we might understand the energetics driving the various Christian traditions across two millennia as fueled by the Christ event in which, knowing full well that gods and humans are mutually exclusive categories (and this is the whole point, isn't it?), god is declared to be human, indeed so fully human as to be subject to death. God is not human; human is not God. God is human; human is God. And it goes on: death is life; indeed, eternal life. Poetic chiasms of impossibles. The sensory richness of the last supper (with the impossible identities of drink and blood, bread and body) and crucifixion and the empty tomb provide aesthetics—the feeling sensing experience—of the impossible, the human god, god human, living dead.

I sometimes refer to the structurality of this aesthetic of impossibles by the technical term *metastability*, borrowing it from science largely to demonstrate that it is not rare and unusual or

humanities-soft but rather that as a copresence it exists every-where; I like to say it is as common as dirt.[67] Metastability is when each of two or more things depends on a distinction from the other, yet their identity or copresence with one another is not a problem to be solved but rather is the dynamic source of energetics and vitality. Natural language illustrates metastability; the word is both the same and different from its referent. The word *is* its referent; the word *is not* its referent (the word "cat" can't scratch you). We do not understand the power of language by resolving the impossibility of the copresence of *is* and *is not*, but rather by appreciating how this metastability is the very source of its power. Going further, the force of metaphor is in its metastability; metaphor can be described as understanding something in terms of something else, which we know full well it is not. Metaphor structurality is to say something *is* what we know it *is not*. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980), Zoltan Kövecses (2010). and others have shown, metaphor underlies the power of language and it's structurality is metastability: holding as copresent that something is what we clearly know it is not.

Another aspect of an aesthetic of impossibles is shared with moving; as process its course may be charted by halting or transducing into event, yet the ongoingness is characterized by the presence of the unpredictable, the creative influence of accident, the presence of true random influences.

The word *nonlinearity* is a technical term that refers to the unpredictable, the unexpected, the surprises, the novelties, the randomness that occurs in any complex self-regulating network from the nervous system to the animate organism to societies including religions. Nonlinearity too is inspired by moving; since moving is in any place, there is a necessary element of the unexpected and unpredictable in the very essence of moving. Nonlinearities are what laboratories seek to eliminate and what academic theories and definitions seek to normalize and reduce.

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[67] Mary Douglas and Jonathan Smith showed that dirt is not a phenomenological category but rather a relational one; a valuation based on the copresence of a thing and a place. The term dirt then implicates the long history of considerations of place and the dynamics and value dependent on place. Yet, I also simply mean to implicate the ubiquity of soil or earth; it is always and everywhere beneath our feet.

Yet nonlinearity is an essential part of any system and, in my view, it exists at the core of change and creativity. History and biography and even scientific theory may articulate recognizable patterns, yet our interest in such accounts is always drawn to those occasions where nonlinearity becomes apparent and impactful. In religious contexts nonlinearity is essential to the excitement collecting around free will, fate, destiny, evil, and death. In a one hundred percent predictable world, a world absent nonlinearity, none of these terms would have any play at all.

The late physicist Stephen Hawking and others sometimes contemplated a grand theory of everything (GTE), a sort of complex mathematical formula that would calculate the condition of anything at any place and any time including the very invention of the GTE formula itself. Hawking (2011) saw this as the end of science. Given his academic theology of religion, Eliade didn't care much for history because of its relativity and nonlinearity; read also its humanity. His theory of religion was one that identifies with humans and their penchant for making history the presence of nonlinearity, its relativity, its conflict and variance from the perfect world of godly creation.[68] Eliade seemed to allow creativity only if it is a replication of godly creation; and that seems to pretty much eliminate novelty.

Taking radically the implications of the primacy of moving for a proper study of religion requires that we embrace these notions of *metastability* and *nonlinearity* with the greatest of expectations and interest resulting in, I believe, a richer account of religion and religions. They comprise aspects of an aesthetic of impossibles. Playing out this aesthetic is, I'd suggest, the forte of religions. Exploring them should be the mandate of the study of religion.

Comparison

I believe it is common among religion scholars today to be aware of comparison as an academic technique, yet to either feel that it is to be avoided or that it is irrelevant to their work or maybe wonder how, if at all, it might be useful. Comparison is discour-

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[68] The notion of human making, particularly as it relates to technology, is at the center of my *Religion and Technology.*

aged by the checkered history of the use of comparison in the service to imperialism and proselytization, by certain shortcomings of the examples of comparison by the great patternists and encyclopedists, and even by Smith's common seemingly devastating criticism of examples of comparison in religion scholarship. Yet, any proper study of religion must be open to a universal field from which to draw potential data, that is, it must, in principle, include as potentially relevant materials from all cultures and times in human history. In practical terms, a proper academic study of religion cannot avoid comparison. Classification, definition, typology, terminology, data identification, discourse, perception, and advancements to knowledge are shot through with applications of comparison, if often implicit. Anything comprised of metaphor, art, ritual, language, symbols, and the like have comparison as an implicit and essential dynamic. The very materials that scholars study, existing in media quite different from the actual subjects themselves, exist because of extensive transduction that involves comparison, if tacitly functioning as a technique.

While few scholars should, or likely even could, engage comparison on a large scale, nonetheless religion scholars must recognize that all their terms, categories, data, and techniques have come to be of value through a history of comparative applications and refinements. The common terms and interests among varying specializations in a proper academic study of religion depend on a comparative enterprise.

Smith presented several writings on comparison as a technique for a proper academic study. The critical understanding of the various modes, classes, styles, and technical requirements for an adequate academic comparison must be essential training for any religion scholar. Smith has provided extensive historical and critical materials to support this training. Even more broadly and importantly, as I attempted to show, Smith's understanding of comparison involves what he called the necessary double-face, the holding at once two things that are both alike (even the same) in some respect, yet also not the same. It is the simultaneous holding of sameness and difference by which comparison—metaphor is a banal example in natural language—expands understanding with seeming endless application. While comparison may be adapted as a technique of limited

application leading to specified and inarguable conclusion, its greater value is in its tendency to remain an oscillating playful ongoing relational technique. It is a generator of purposeful movement. Smith engaged comparison in the more limited sense when he examined Frazer's description of a cultural example considering the source from which Frazer extracted the example. Smith could determine definitively, and often even statistically, Frazer's failures based on this use of comparison. Yet, comparative techniques were also used by Smith for the broader concerns of how we comprehend the commonalities, the samenesses, among the seeming endless, almost overwhelming, diversity, and to do so without the dismissal of difference. Such a technique resists the halt of stating conclusive meaning by encouraging the vitalizing ongoing pursuit of the expanding implications of important issues and concerns.

In the context of the foregrounding of moving as a guide to developing a proper study of religion, comparison when used as a technique for immediate and definitive conclusion engages the backfilling gridifying technique that brings halt, if intermediate, to the comparative operation. While comparison applied on the model of the necessary double-face actually functions to advance insight, inquiry, and engagement while fueling the ongoing movement of the process of encounter and inquiry.

Comparison is inseparable from the ongoingness of moving. The urge to compare, the necessity to compare, is the desire (Barbaras) that is the lifeforce of self-moving. We live our scholarly work through the moving vehicle of comparison.[69]

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[69] An explicit programmatic description of comparison as technique might seem to merit presence in the main text of this essay, yet I think it might here be best developed in a note. In a lecture presented at the University of Umeå, October 8, 2019, titled "'What the One Thing Shows Me in the Case of Two Things': Comparison as Essential to a Proper Academic Study of Religion," published in *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 2021 1-19, I developed two modes of comparison. First, *objective limited comparison* which I consider the workhorse of comparison. This is the comparison Smith used in comparing Frazer's thousands of citations of specific cultural materials to the text that Frazer cited as his source. As I discussed in the essay on comparison above, this is a relatively systematic technique that Smith was able to report in objective terms. This is the technique Smith used in his study

Religion/Religions; Genera/Species

The distinction between movement and moving corresponds with Brian Massumi's term backfill, Erin Manning's term territorialize (Manning 2009:23), both likely reflecting the influence of Henri Bergson who wrote of the "retrograde movement of the truth" (Bergson 1946). Where the term movement might refer to a halt that captures and holds something that its dynamics be analyzed, in doing so this technique tends to lose the moving. Movement results from a

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"I am a Parrot (Red)" *History of Religions* (1972) 391-413 to determine that the text in question was misquoted. It is the technique Smith used in his study of Eliade's use of the Australian Aboriginal example of Numbakulla and the Sacred Pole. It is the technique of comparison I used to consider the same example in my work *Storytracing*. It is the mode of comparison I taught students by insisting that they "check their sources." Yet, this mode of limited objective comparison never exists alone. It is always in service to another mode that I termed *subjective heuristic comparison*. This mode of comparison is what I describe, following Peirce, as a "feeling kind of knowing." It is the mode of comparison initiated by surprise or incongruity or difference or gap that initiates the processes, often tacitly performed and also often in a brief mood of reflection, that might be called hypothetic inference. This "hands-on" subjective and experiential mode of comparison becomes the "third" factor that Smith insists is always present in comparison. That is, it is a hunch or best guess, that is often formalized by academic necessity as hypothesis or perspective. The fundamental point here, where moving is emphasized, is that these modes of comparison—objective and subjective, limited and heuristic—are always paired and linked even as they can be analytically separated and performed separately. Even as hypothesis arises from subjective heuristic comparison yields to perhaps extensive applications of limited objective comparison, the results of the latter demand a return to the former for revision and modification and a subsequent iteration. I hold that no issue or concerns worth our time are not fueled by the oscillating, perhaps spiraling movement, of this example of what above I've referred to as the necessary double-face. And further, when we reflect on the enormous tedious work of limited objective compareson that fills the lifetimes of most academics, we could not comprehend this as anything other than wasteful were it not for the dynamic and generative energetics of the life-giving movings of the interplay of these modes of comparison.

transduction of the energetics of moving itself, moving in process, into trace or mark or text or description or meaning. The gestural and postural skills that identify the academic enterprise tend to discourage moving.[70] The academy is, in a fundamental sense, the transduction of a moving reality into books and labs, into movement-controlled if not also movement-discouraging environments. The gestural naturalization of movement tends to obfuscate the living, moving, vitality of our subjects, diminishing them to mere objects of academic description and analysis.

It seems an important inspiration for students of religion to recognize and to account for the moving/movement distinction. Along with others,[71] I have tended to use the paired terms *religion* and *religions*, distinguished by singular/plural, in the effort to do so. As Jonathan Smith proclaimed some time ago, religion (singular) is the scholar's invention, yet I would propose that religions (plural) are not.[72] He was addressing this difference in writing about the data that are associated with religion,

> while there is a staggering amount of data, phenomena, of human experiences and expressions that might be characterized in one culture or another, by one criterion or another, as religion—there is no data for religion. Religion is solely the creation of the scholar's study. It is created for the scholar's analytic purposes by his imaginative acts of comparison and generalization. Religion has no independent existence apart from the academy (Smith 1988: xi).

The data, indeed staggering amounts, reflect the real worlds of folks who have and practice religions (whether identified by them with a generic term or not), yet there is a creative encounter between the scholar who declares that certain sets of data are religious and the universe of possible data. There is no ontological category, no natural set, of data that are religious as such apart from encounter with the scholar. I think there are

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[70] Our jobs are described as positions, lines, or chairs. Our work is to articulate a position or a stance or a point of view.

[71] Certainly, Braun and McCutcheon as well as Smith.

[72] In his article "Religion, Religions, Religious" in Mark Taylor, *Critical Terms for Religious Studies* (1998) Jonathan Smith gives the full history of the distinction of the singular and plural uses of the term.

limitations to this argument (non-academic folk broadly use the term religion as a genera label), yet it does support the importance of distinguishing between the scholar's invention—the genus religion—and the world of behaviors and actions and ideas of folks of differing identities and cultures.

Religion involves the ongoing comparative discourse on and construction of a common category, be it academic or folk. It contributes to the modern liberal concern of the humanities and importantly so. Religions (from this perspective) are however the stuff of our discourse that makes it a conversation that is not wholly self-referential and abstract and academic, despite our penchant for this tendency. Religions are essential to religion; yet religion, at least in some technical academic sense, is not essential to and is often totally unknown to and commonly irrelevant to the subjects, the data, the stuff comprising religions. Because a proper academic study of religion is an enterprise of secular humanities and social sciences (perhaps also in some senses, if not now more likely in the future, the natural sciences), it is to be expected that some (all?) religious communities and adherents might consider this proper academic study threatening and perhaps wholly illegitimate.[73] In my studies of Native American religions I often found that the folks I was studying were negatively disposed to me if I indicated an interest in their religion because in their long experience with this English term it was inseparable from a long history of forces of oppression.

While the distinction religion/religions has long been made, the essential inference from the perspective of moving, that implicates the copresence of both religion and religions, is that we need appreciate that much of the moving is halted (or shifted into a quite different movement-discouraging intellectual sphere) by academic studies, that we need develop methods that honor the moving aspect of both religion and religions, and that

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[73] I remember my late former father-in-law telling me that he liked me a whole lot more when I was religious (which to him meant I went to church with his family) rather than after I started studying religion academically. My book *Mother Earth: An American Story* (1987) received a similar statement from a colleague who told me that he preferred my Native American studies much more when it seemed I was focused on appreciating Native Americans and their religions, while he found my study of Mother Earth to be somehow opposed to them.

the very vitality of the academic study of religion is generated in holding as copresent both these terms, however impossible this might seem. I sometimes use the awkward gerund "religioning" to remind that it is the ongoingness of religions (and in a different sense also the study of religion) that is, or I believe should be, most interesting. The extended discussion of the various roles and functions, as well as the confusions, of experience in academic processes are I believe a happy complexity that is introduced and foregrounded by a proper study of religion that appreciates the importance of moving.

Defining Religion

Any academic study identifying itself with the term religion must, it would seem, offer at least a working definition; surely such a definition is among the fruit of the academic invention. Smith wrote,

> Religion is the quest, within the bounds of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's 'situation' so as to have 'space' in which to meaningfully dwell. It is the power to relate one's domain to the plurality of environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence 'matters'. Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for humane existence. What we study when we study religion is the variety of attempts to map, construct and inhabit such positions of power through the use of myths, rituals, and experiences of transformation (Smith 1987: 200-1).

When I was a graduate student at Chicago, we spent much time reading and analyzing definitions. At that time my sense was that, even as seemingly unlikely to ever achieve consensus, we were still aiming to come up with a definition. This seems no longer the fashion, yet the enterprise is still occasionally recognized as important.

Thomas Tweed's 2006 *Crossing and Dwelling: A Theory of Religion* is a book length effort to do so in the broad sense that a theory of religion offers definition, yet, despite the complexity of his theory/definition, it gravitates toward the core idea that

religions "intensify joy and comfort suffering."[74] In his *Between Heaven and Earth* (2005) Robert Orsi reflects on the Protestant Christian influence on a broadly held folk understanding summed in the phrase "religion is good" and suggests this understanding is commonly held by religion scholars as well.[75] The platitude that religion is good is a popular/folk expression, especially in the context of religious conflict and violence associated with religion. A fascinating conundrum to the popular identity of religion with the good arose in 1978 when, during the national professional meetings of religious organizations in New Orleans, what is now referred to as the Jonestown massacre, took place. I well recall watching the news on television as various specialists, none of whom were among those attending the meetings in New Orleans, attempted to come to terms with such a tragic and shocking event that had undeniable

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[74] Thomas Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling* writing, *"Religions are confluences of organic-cultural flows that intensify joy and confront suffering by drawing on human and suprahuman forces to make homes and cross boundaries"* (54, Tweed's italics). My concerns with this statement are several. It seems to presuppose independent superhuman forces, which, it seems to me, distinguishes the category by some ontologically religious data; such a position was warned against by Smith. While Tweed's definition is consistent with Smith's notion that religion provides method by which to create a place in which we might meaningfully dwell, it focuses the factor of meaningfulness on the goal to "intensify joy and confront suffering." I find this a moving-suppressing and not so interesting way of distinguishing religion, reflecting common contemporary Western folk definitions, rather than a richer academic construct that would be open to religion having as an energizing strength its capacity to create impossible copresents. This aspect of Tweed's definition reflects a romanticism that is not in Smith's understanding. I'm also just endlessly put off by the phrase "intensifying joy and confront suffering." I recall a Navajo story, I've forgotten the source now, that shows an acceptance to the pain of grief on the occasion of loss. I don't really comprehend how one would think that maximizing joy and minimizeing suffering could ever be understood as an appropriate goal for human beings.

[75] For a discussion of "religion is good" see Robert Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth* (2005) 187-89 which is set in the context of a broader description of the development of the contemporary academic study of religion in the context of American Christianity.

religious implications. While many religion scholars attempted to distance themselves from Jonestown by proclaiming this horrible event involved cult activity that was not religious, it was Jonathan Smith who boldly tackled the topic in his 1982 article[76] "The Devil and Mr. Jones," which was, Smith noted, the first academic consideration of these events. He clearly recognized that Jonestown presented a major challenge to the very shape of the academic study of religion; the article begins and ends with this framing. What was undeniable to Smith was the relevance of this "religion that seems bad" to a proper academic study. The final sentence in this article reads, "if we do not persist in the quest for intelligibility, there can be no human sciences, let alone, any place for the study of religion within them" (Smith 1982b: 120).

What we must recognize from the perspective of an appreciation of moving is that defining religion is a halting activity. To define (at least to arrive at a broadly embraced definition) suggests our work is done, seemingly also that our subject is dead, at least no longer moving. We sometimes qualify the objective of our urge to define as producing a working definition, yet as a qualification it betrays our sense that a final definition is our true goal; that we are progressing in the work leading to a final definition. We tend to prefer *autopsy* to *kinesiology*; a proper study of religion probably needs to reverse this valuation.

I've often contemplated how we might model the use of the term religion on our common use of color terms. For a host of reasons (biological, cultural, historical, psychological, environmental) there is no satisfying way to precisely define a color term

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[76] This article published in 1982 was first delivered as a Woodward Court Lecture at the College of the University of Chicago in 1980. The article is the last chapter in Smith's *Imagining Religion: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982) contributing something of a bracketing function to the book as reflected in the book's subtitle. Due to Smith's boldness in including murder, suicide, and many things dark as important to the study of religion, the 1978 events at Jonestown have remained a topic of importance to the study of religion. See, for example, David Chidester's *Salvation and Suicide: Jim Jones, the Peoples Temple, and Jonestown* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).

without ignoring most of what makes color interesting and aesthetic (in both senses of perceived/experienced and found beautiful). Yet, we not only use color terms knowing that we are all talking about approximately the same thing, but we also find the energetics of the conversation located in the variances and differences and applications and observations. Color terms encourage discourse on variations in style, culture, history, aesthetics, philosophy, and psychology. What delights in such conversations is the appreciation that color terms and the corresponding experiential realities are so interesting precisely because they resist and confound objective grasp and final definition.[77] It is further of great interest to me that most three-year-old kids are quite comfortable with this fluid dynamic of defining (for them by means of naming) color. They even grasp without protest the nuance of adding "ish" (or equivalents such as "sort of") to color terms. That object is "reddish" or "sort of red." These kids also have no difficulty accepting that a toy that is red in bright light appears to their eye as maroon or even black when the lighting is dim, yet they will still call the toy red in color. In my experience with kids and color, they love asking you your favorite color and telling you which is theirs. How remarkable is this human capacity for color perception and naming![78] Surely religion scholarship would be advanced should we be able to appreciate that a certain -ishiness would follow Smith's recommendation that we not take ourselves so seriously. A measure of -ishiness in our use of the term religion (religionish or sort of religious) might serve to allow us the openness to appreciate variations, surprises, and nuances that a devotion to the totalizing definitive would not.

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[77] Color is a wonderfully rich topic. The biology of sight varies with person and species. Color terminology is believed to impact perceptual capabilities. Colors confound with environment and one another. Color is both objective and subjective and the experience of color can never be isolated to one or the other.

[78] I recently engaged my four-year-old grandson in an extended and sophisticated conversation on color. He frequently used with confidence the phrase "kind of" connected with colors. He also seemed quite confident in his self-reflection on why we might have such qualifying words as "kind of" given his confident understanding of color categories and how they correlated with perceptions.

My sense is that developing a similar strategy for the study of religion—that is, *conversations* and *accounts* honoring differences in style as opposed to halting definitions—opens the study to the moving energetics and vitality that are surely what most attracts us to our studies. Aren't we most fascinated by studying what surprises, what challenges, what seems to defy convention, what makes us laugh out loud? Such a strategy also avoids prickly academic arguments in defense of terms while directing our attention toward religions and religioning, the actual stuff of our interest.

Transduction and the Issue of Data

Jonathan Smith's statement, already quoted, that there are no ontologically religious data correlates with his observation that comparison, at least what is compared, is not natural. I want to consider these points in the terms and techniques I have referred to as transduction. The issue also relates to Smith's concluding riddle in "Map is Not Territory" in which he claimed that maps are all we have and his lecture "Reading Religion" in which he indicated that reading, for him, yields cognitive gains, that is, as "a privileged mode of *mediated* rather than *immediate* sight or experience" (Braun and McCutcheon 2018: 121. italics in original). Immediate sight or experience is what I have termed "in the presence of" experience, a direct encounter of the object of study with the full array of one's senses. Mediated, in Smith's use, amounts to focusing on an intermediate constructed form (writing, map, chart, image) that stands between the scholar and his or her subject; or, in Smith's case, might be even given higher value than the immediate experience of one's subject.

What I want to attend to by my use of the term transduction is that this intermediate form does not have a natural or one-to-one relationship with the objects and reality it mediates. That is, the mediated form does not appear on its own as a part of the given world. It is constructed and I believe that while this transduction is sometimes acknowledged (especially in the literature of translation), the nature of the gap and the way it is overcome between subject and media of presentation is given far too little attention, often none at all.

Early in my graduate studies at Chicago I found that my background and experience had ill prepared me for the study of

religion at least in the terms that practically all my fellow students were electing. As a farm boy from Kansas with education in math and business and a nascent career as a research analyst and computer geek, I had precious little comprehension of the world beyond the American Midwest. In a strategy to somehow engage a study that I might hope to be prepared for, I asked my advisors what they thought about me studying Native Americans. My thinking was that at least I shared something of a landscape with these folks even if not a personal history. I was promptly told that such was impossible because "they have no texts." That is, they didn't do their own work of transduction; alternatively, that the equivalent of transduction would be necessary for any study at all. Still, I forged ahead perhaps because I had no alternatives and likely also because I didn't understand the implications of their statement. Walter Capps, who kindly included an article of mine in a collection on Native Americans that was one of my first publications (Gill 1976), wrote a massive book *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (1995) in which he charted two hundred years of the history of the field. He gave attention to the major questions that had been pursued in the development of the study. He critically summarized the works of the major figures who had contributed to this long history. The heritage was, as he presented it, an intellectual history, a seeming endless series of European and later American intellectuals who wrote extensively about religion. Much of it would rightly be termed theology (more generally, thought); the writings of texts about god (*theos*). Much of it would fittingly be understood as biblical studies; the study of Jewish and Christian scripture; eventually expanded to include the sacred texts (or bible equivalents) of other literate traditions.[79] Much of it was of the second order intellectual tradition of reading and writing about others who read and write about some common interest related to religion. In terms of the Christian heritage this writing would once have been termed "church history" or "theology."

When I used to teach graduate courses on the history of the field, I had students read Capps' book giving them a supplemen-

[79] For example, Friedrich Max Muller editing fifty volumes of translations, *The Sacred Books of the East* (1879-1910).

tal concern to keep in mind while reading; I asked them to note where in the book they encountered the first reference that could be identified as either a non-white (I could alternative have said "Christian") or a female scholar. The results are obvious, if nonetheless still shocking. Perhaps only long after I'd finished my PhD and had been teaching did I come to fully understand why my advisors had discouraged my studying Native Americans because "they have no texts" and, of course, my own history obviously plays a central role in the writing of this whole series of essays focused on moving and a desire to include, or at least consider, as important the "in the presence of" kind of experience of the subject of study.

I had boldly, if also naively, gone where I was told I should not go thinking that somehow ethnographic texts, description, constituted the equivalent of what my teachers had meant by text. Indeed, my study of Navajo prayer was based on my location and study of what I referred to as "twenty thousand lines" of prayer "texts;" not fully appreciating that, for a culture that historically does not write, the terms "lines" and "texts" made sense only as concocted and placed in the context of Western historical literate conventions. But my dissertation was approved, and I went on with my career, if always feeling some dis-ease about this false equivalence.[80]

Capps' account of the making of the discipline in a certain sense raises a question that I believe is a career-long tension in Smith's work. In Capps' account the massive body of writings and written sacred texts really are data that are inarguably subjects of religion studies. The authors of these texts self-identified as religion writers (or the writings of the self-proclaimed religious) and their writings being unquestionably about religion. The Jewish and Christian literature identified by the term bible are distinctively religious. Capps' book showed that the academic study of religion was well defined in terms of

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[80] Early in my career I had to face this issue in "Nonliterate Traditions and Holy Book: Toward a New Model" in Frederick Denny and Rodney Taylor (eds.) *The Holy Book in Comparative Perspective: Studies in Origins, Forms, and Functions* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1985) 224-39. I must note here that I eventually learned the egregious error of classifying folks in terms of a trait they do not have. We live and learn, hopefully.

a lineage of religiously interested intellectuals writing largely for an audience of other intellectuals. Smith's description of his approach being one of reading religion is surely his way of locating himself within this long tradition. And I think it clear that the bulk of the public study of religion today also is firmly and comfortably (meaning without the discomfort of questioning its adequacy and legitimacy) in this lineage. My late good friend Del Brown and I had many a heated discussion early in our careers. He considered that religion studies and the study of religious thought were synonymous even though his field was process theology (the branch known as liberation theology having strong ties to politics and social activism). He recognized that such an intellectual activity informed and contributed to his own (and doubtless also to others) search for salvation (his word). He could not understand how my study of Native Americans was legitimate in any sense at all as religion studies since he couldn't see how it might save me; I often lost (better, forfeited) these arguments when Del invoked Alfred North Whitehead, his favorite intellectual. Yet, at a later point Del did come to realize that what I was doing might have some value to me and to others, even when I showed little interest in my own salvation.

Smith's early work was focused on Frazer. Frazer's work, while informed clearly by western intellectual history, shifted, in the tradition of nineteenth century anthropology, to a global context with heavy emphasis on ethnographic sources to document the specific cultural distinctions of thousands of cultures across the globe, most of them did not write, they did/do not "have texts." The implication is that these "poor" folks without "texts" don't have religions or at least religions worth studying. This inference was not lost on Smith who noted, after listing the seven "world religions" (those with texts) followed by the category "Primitive" and ending with the category "Others or none," that "More than one fifth of the world's population has just been informed that religiously they have no identity and might as well not exist."[81] He did not note also that those classified as "Primitive" were another five percent comprised of

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81 Smith 1978: 296. Smith does not offer his source for the list and numbers.

thousands of cultures each with its own, invariably unwritten, language. Yet, of even greater significance is that until very recently only a very small percentage among those identified as adherents of the seven listed world religions could either read or write.[82]

The presence or absence of writing has played a large role in the turf divisions of anthropology/ethnography and the study of religion, in the core (if quite artificial) distinction between literate and nonliterate.[83] The distinction between cosmogonic text, myth, and folklore was often used to identify the borders between religion studies, anthropology, and folklore. Although even with this division, the association of myth with oral tradition along with the utter confusion about the relationship of myth and truth, occasionally gave rise to the confounding questions about whether religions such as Christianity actually have myths (see Mack 2003).

Smith's work, shaped by his extensive studies of Frazer which included his own acquisition of vast data on cultures, many that "have no texts," then began to body the tension between "reading religion" in the European intellectual tradition and engaging the potential that in the many cultures across the globe descriptions might be relevant to the study of religion. I suggest that it is in the forge heated by these incongruities, that

[82] I must be clear here. I consider writing and reading an action as potentially important as any others. I am in no way attempting to make contentious divisions as has been commonly done in recent decades between text and practice. Reading and writing are as much a practice as anything else; indeed, this is a core argument (and justification) for my understanding of why we do this strange business of studying religion academically.

[83] This term, nonliterate, is a precarious and complicated one. I once wrote a book titled *Beyond "The Primitive:" The Religions of Nonliterate Peoples* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1982), attempting to avoid the obvious pejorative implications of that conglomerate of terms that indicate primitivity. Yet, of course, later I came to more fully appreciate that one cannot identify a classification of cultures in negative terms, that is, by traits or media they do not have. I dealt with this thorny issue more fully in Gill, "Not by Any Name" in *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference.* I use the term nonliterate here simply as a convenient, if not legitimate term, in the contest of the preference for texts and writings.

Smith began to articulate fundamental principles for a proper academic study of religion.

While Smith wrote extensively on classical topics in this western intellectual history, he also wrote on the Bororo, the Ainu, the West Ceremese, the Arrernte, and so many other cultures unfamiliar and unknown to those in the intellectual heritage (cultures that "had no texts" and thus had to be mediated for western intellectual access); he was sometimes criticized for doing so. Smith did so in part that the genus religion be properly academic in the sense of being inclusive of all human cultures; that religion be a valued category in the larger enterprise of appreciating the distinctiveness of being human.

If we might hold that a proper academic study of religion in a secular environment be inclusive, that is, be open to the possibility that all or most cultures have practices and behaviors and beliefs that we might want to consider as religious, then a major shift must occur in terms of the heritage that is determined by intellectual data (writing and reading) produced by an often isolated and intellectual few. If, as Smith suggests, the potential data for the study of religion are those determined and specified by the scholar of religion, then there must be some equivalence between these intellectual writings of the scholarly few and the ethnographic writings of the practices and behaviors of the many, the folk. There must also be an openness to what has been largely overlooked even in these traditions that have written texts, the actions and behaviors of the folk which comprise the bulk of what at least the folk consider to be religiously important. When I have studied ritual, I discovered that most studies of ritual are not of the actual ritual actions themselves, but rather of the texts that describe how ritual should be conducted.

Should we take seriously Justice Clark's insistence that a proper academic study be from a perspective outside of the religion presented, as being in some sense *about* them, then we must ask of both these data sources and types, what are they about? We must realize that in our academic making of religion, the *about* taken in the most radical sense, must include and be distinguished by a sort of primacy of lifeway, the primacy of the sensory rich experiential actions and awarenesses that include the actual rituals, behaviors, practices, dances, dramas, and, yes,

even the gestural practices of reading and writing while stationed at one's desk. These moving things have the primacy that what we study might be understood as being about them.

Perhaps most radically for those who find religion existing only in the form of writings, mediated or immediate, is the coming to awareness that what might be considered religious about most of the folk who have ever lived has almost nothing to do with writing because until quite recently only the few could read and write, much less consider themselves to be, or even to know, intellectuals. To me there is no little irony in the current convention of referring to these masses with such marginalizing terms as "practical religion," "living religion," "folk religion."

I offer the notion of transduction, the transformative operations that convert something of one sensory reality field into something of a different and usually much more restricted sensory reality field. I have spent many a day and night at Hopi watching kachina dances. In sheer sensory terms they are unbelievably rich. There are the smells of Hopi cooking, the plants and animals in the area, the smoke coming from the chimneys often scented by the burning juniper and piñon. From atop the Hopi mesas there is the vista across the northern Arizona landscape with San Francisco Peaks on the horizon ninety miles away. There are the vast constantly changing colors and characteristics of the high desert. Then close by there is the distinct architecture of the pueblos and the village. From a rooftop one can see the Hopi people in and out of their homes preparing for and awaiting the Kachina dancing. When they arrive, the Kachinas are adorned with remarkably complex masks and costumes in bright colors. The sounds are subtle and complex as well. There are also the quiet and natural sounds that can be heard without the industrial sounds of cities. The sounds of Hopi language and laughter. The sonorous and haunting sounds of Kachina singing with accompanying rhythm from rattles, bells, and drums. The feelings and tastes have a distinctiveness to Hopi as well. All of this together comprise Hopi; feels Hopi.

The point I'm making here by writing these few sentences is that in writing them I've transduced unbelievably complex fields of sensory perception into but a hint of a full presentation of some specific experience I had at Hopi; a pale description of a

few of the major aspects of the sensory field. Yet in my transduced presentation the only sense that is present is limited to the reader's sight, to the words written and reproduced on the printed page. The order of sensory constriction, the demands on this process of transduction, may seem so radical that the whole process is hopeless. Yet, as I write these things, as I engage in this transductive act, I can somehow, in some fashion, if diminished, see and hear and smell and taste and feel Hopi; things distinctive to Hopi and their identity and culture. And perhaps so might anyone who has been there or even has experienced long vistas or rich cultural events or ritual dancing or communities with their distinctive smells and tastes. These readers too can somehow experience something of the subject from this crunched impoverished transduction.

I have written of this process as quite magical on the order of alchemy. It is the alchemy enabled by sensory memory and imagination, if also by poetic description (I wish mine were more so) from careful observation. It is a circulating alchemy that takes the golden bough and turns it into ink and paper, yet it also is the remarkable alchemy that allows the golden tree to grow and bloom once again in the ordinary act of reading about it. Frankly, I believe that the reason I cannot stop writing, why I have always been so excited by writing, is because in doing so I become the alchemist, or his apprentice, and experience making this magic.

I think the complexities and possibilities raised by the awareness of the operations of transduction are among the most important and fascinating, yet almost totally ignored, issues in building a proper academic study of religion. This is the issue raised by Smith in proclaiming "map is all we have."

What I'd like to suggest is that the form of almost all the data of our studies, however we determine which are relevant, are the product of transduction. If the long heritage of the study—of our subject, our data set—is limited to intellectual thought, then the writings are the transduction from thought to writing. If our data are the sensory rich behaviors that include objects and actions, then the written descriptions are also transductions from action to description. Walter Ong, Marshal McLuhan, Jack

Goody, even J. L. Austin,[84] wrote extensively and convincingly about the differences between orality and literacy, about the importance of medium to message.

The point is that our data are almost always the product of a radical transduction that can't help but reshape, even shift the ontological character of, our subject, of what our studies are about. What we lose when we fail to recognize and appreciate the effects of transduction is the richness of human experience in the full registers of the senses, movement, action, behavior, and vitality.

The "End" of Religion Studies

Kimberley Patton's and Benjamin Ray's 2000 edited volume *A Magic Still Dwells* is a collection of essays on comparison that develops from Jonathan Smith's (1982) essay on comparison "In Comparison a Magic Dwells" and, of course, his extended writing on comparison. The volume not only reprints Smith's essay, it also concludes with an essay by him titled "The 'End' of Comparison: Redescription and Rectification."[85] As is so common to Smith's titles this one poses a riddle, after his fashion. By putting the word end in quotation marks, Smith calls attention to the multiple meanings the word might suggest. As he so often criticized the comparisons of so many others, one sense of the word "end" might be that he is proclaiming, against the obvious premise of this collection, that comparison should

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[84] See for example Ong 2012, McLuhan 2001, Goody 1986, and Austin 1975 among others.

[85] Professor Patton told me that Jonathan was highly reluctant and resistant to write this essay. It is brief and I know that Jonathan's style includes putting out provocative work while refusing to attempt to resolve its ambiguities and riddles. Writing this little essay for Smith is something on the order of the response William Faulkner gave to an audience question following a lecturing at the University of Virginia. "Mr. Faulkner why did you write *The Sound and the Fury*?" Faulkner answered: "Oh, I had an image in mind of a little girl climbing a tree with dirty drawers." I'm grateful that Professor Patton cajoled Jonathan into writing this essay precisely because it extends the riddle of "ends." It also reminds me of how much I dislike those questions to artists and scholars such as "So what were you really trying to say?" or "What did you mean when you wrote this article?"

come to an end. Be done with comparison, damn it! I've heard scholars state that they believe this was Smith's intent. Yet he might also be intending to draw our attention to his wisdom about why we should compare, what we should be getting out of it, to what end (benefits and achievements) does practicing comparison promise to lead us. This riddle presents the necessary double-face that I have argued was common to Smith's work and the core idea in his understanding of comparison. Smith's riddle related to comparison serves to keep open and in question what we religion scholars/teachers do and why we do it, taking seriously the possibility of the very end of the enterprise of religion studies. We must always ask why we are doing what we do. Can there even be a proper academic study of religion? Is it of value? Is it legitimate? Does it serve anything beyond our assortment of tiny intellectual cohorts? Does it do harm? Is it but a disguised imperialist strategy or a subtle method of proselytization? Is doing it worth what we get paid? None of these are questions with final answers, yet they are questions we must never fail to ask or be asking.

To what end should a proper academic study of religion be directed? In this essay the emphasis on moving and an aesthetic of impossibles encourages process, openness, ongoingness, the persistence of a process of negotiation, revision, application, and reconsideration, both to envision our subject in the religions of others and also in the inventive process of religion scholarship. As a certain phase of moving and mapping we attempt to halt things, a momentary effort to control the moving that we might grasp as whole the journey, the system, the dynamics. Constructing maps by academics is writing books and articles *about* our subjects perhaps complemented with the creation of other fixed media such as diagrams, tables, and photographs. I stress that both the academic (and folk) sphere of constructing religion and the sphere of the practice and action of religions in culture and history have phases, or aspects, of moving (where there is no place because it is moving) and movement (where halting forms are created for just the purpose of their stopping the dynamic, if momentarily). It was a persistent insight of Smith to recognize this commonality between religion and religions, between the academic study of religion(s) and their actual practice. The rarely

considered implication is the possibility that the *ends* of each, religion and religions, are not entirely or necessarily different.

As Smith and others have articulated what might be recognized as relevant to the end to which our efforts are directed, they have commonly invoked the term *place*. For decades students of religion have sought a firm place on which to stand; evident for example in Smith's book *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (1987), Smith's article "The Influence of Symbols on Social Change: A Place on Which to Stand" (1970) and Tony Swain's book *A Place for Strangers: Towards a History of Australian Aboriginal Being* (1996).[86] This attention to place has sometimes taken on the proclamation that there is some proper place, the assumption of a particular theory or definition or approach, for example. Eliade articulated his construction of religion in terms of a fixed center (to be slightly redundant) and an originating time. Smith credits Eliade with teaching that "to ask the character of the place on which one stands is the fundamental question for the study of religion" (Smith 1978b). Eliade understood in largely negative terms the ongoingness, the moving of religions, the history of religions, the metastable nonlinear (or relativist) aspects of religions that inevitably arise over time. He imagined ritual as the antidote to history allowing a cyclic return (eternally) to the purity of the original firm place. For Eliade religion offered fixed places—principles, rules, ideas, deities that offered a firm foundation and a stable world—and moving was acceptable only within or modeled on this fixedness or as some sort of return or renewal to those founding times and places. Eliade's categories of the fixedness of place were articulated simply as beginnings (mythic time before human time) and centers (the world axis typically the paradigm for the connection of heaven and earth). It is fascinating to me that in Eliade's system it is the gods who fixed (placed) things as it is the humans who seem always to be moving. In his use of the Numbakulla Aboriginal example, Eliade understood that the loss of their fixed place— represented by the broken pole—simply made life impossible for them. The pole (as Eliade concocted it) was their god's way of fixing orientation and also the conduit connecting god with

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[86] There are many articles by Smith that articulate the importance of place.

humanity; without the pole the Arrernte were destined to wander, a fate so intolerable that they, in Eliade's account, simply laid down and died.

Yet Smith, Eliade's colleague, recognized something of the dynamics of place. He brought our attention to the mapping, to even religions as mappings, that directs our attention to the issues of fit/coherence; a favored term being incongruity. Yet, despite this awareness of a fundamental dynamics, Smith sought place, even if place had no ontological status beyond the proclamation of one's present interests and inclinations. He recognized that the choice of a place on which to stand largely determines the outcome of the succeeding academic process, religions too. Scholars have argued for definitions or grounding theories or a selected discipline or a fixed medium or a specified topic on which they might stand, recognizing that the firmness of stance, place, is fundamental in determining outcomes, in producing defendable and definitive results. The study of religion has become gesturally naturalized to articulating its distinctiveness in terms of place. While it is perhaps no longer done in the theological style of Eliade or obvious religious stances, the articulation of place nonetheless occurs in the narrow devotion to the expertise of, some privileged place of, a specific religion, era, figure, event, perspective, medium, issue, problem. Without the serious common and comparative academic discourse on religion, the study of religion gravitates toward a loosely related collection with each sub-field designated largely by geography, historical specificity, or sub-specialty. Scholars are standing firm in all sorts of places with little interest in raising among them any common concern or contention, and without acknowledging the importance of any common discourse.[87]

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[87] Despite important critiques such as Masuzawa 2005 the study of religion remains largely one of studies defined and articulated by place designation: East/West, Asian, Middle Eastern, African, Native American, European, Indigenous, Latin American, Borderlands. The designation of specific world religions as singular (e.g., Christianity) rather than plural (e.g., Christianities) I suspect is due to a strong identity of religion with place. It is without contest that religions, being historical and cultural, are always located geographically, yet even the discussion of religion and movement is often one confined to the dynamics of place. An example of this understanding of movement is

Smith often cited the dictum of Archimedes "give me a place to stand on and I will move the world." While it is possible that the statement was made as evidence of the multiplying force of levers, Smith used it to demonstrate the importance of finding a place on which to stand; that is, carefully constructing and selecting one's theory. I'm suggesting that there is another element of Archimedes' statement that might also be of interest; perhaps an even greater one. An alternative understanding would suggest Archimedes' concern is with agency, the potential for power. To move, as in to "move the world," marks the agency and power of making, doing, creating, acting, living. Archimedes' attention might be read as moving beyond place.

Smith offered a definition of religion in which meaning holds a fundamental place.

> History is the framework within whose perimeter those human expressions, activities and intentionalities that we call "religious" occur. Religion is the quest, within the bound of the human, historical condition, for the power to manipulate and negotiate one's "situation" so as to have "space" in which to meaningfully dwell. It is the power to relate one's domain to the plurality of environmental and social spheres in such a way as to guarantee the conviction that one's existence "matters." Religion is a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for humane existence. What we study when we study religion is the variety of attempts to map, construct and inhabit such positions of power through the use of myths, rituals and experiences of transformation (Smith 1978a: 291).

Restating, if too hastily, religion is the quest for the power to make a place where one's life is filled with meaning. Meaning is not only the scholarly measure of religion (the end to which it strives), it is also a common folk reference to life's goals,

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Thomas Tweed's discussion (2006). The proposition I'm making is that to understand religion in terms of moving, place is made and negotiated as a dynamic of religion rather than a given that delimits one's area of study. Moving (kinesiology) is primary rather than place (autopsy).

religious or not. We so often say we are searching for or have happily found meaning. Given our foregrounding of natural language as the most common focus of gauging and articulating value, meaning seems rather natural. We look up the meanings of words that we might communicate effectively. In academic contexts from an early age, we are taught to find and articulate meaning as the goal of our tasks of interpretation and understanding. Meaning is roughly equivalent to answers, reminding us of Smith's "No Answers, No Questions" study of Frazer. In corporeal conceptual terms we search for meaning *in* and meaning *behind* and meaning *of* whatever is our object of concern. Meaning seems elusive and hidden and the object of quest. Religion, in these terms, is a bit like a player in the game "hide and seek", the study of religion even more so. To find or create meaning is, in Smith's terms, something that *matters.*

In Smith's definitional statement, I've always felt that its most direct and straightforward articulation is rather vague on what is religious about this quest for power and meaning. Might a good job, or a healthy body, or a peaceful or exciting relationship, or a supportive community, or a new car do the same without any of the usual associations with religion?[88] Smith's continuing refinements and developments in the sentences that follow, in this definition, focus a bit more on how we might see some things as particularly religious. Yet, it seems the articulation that distinguishes the religiousness of the data remains imprecise.

Likely it is my decades of dancing and moving that have contributed to my growing impatience with meaning, our quest for it, and our articulation of it. In one of my very first publications[89] I found myself struggling with this issue as it arose for me at Hopi. I spent several days atop a pueblo house in Hottevilla at Hopi watching the dancings and rituals of Kachinas. The sensory richness, the complexity of the costumes, the mesmerizing quality of the singing and dance rhythms, the

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[88] Indeed, movements like "The Secret" turn material desires, including a new car, into a religious action.
[89] I've lost track of this reference, but it was an editorial introduction to an issue of *Parabola* in its earliest years and might have been titled "We Dance for Rain."

endless styles of interactions among the Hopis, the unspoken implications of a vast history of story and tradition, the implications of gender and age, the obvious complexity of secret societies, the traditions of masking and costuming, the huge variety of Kachinas each with stories songs and rhythms, the calendrical implications, the presence of clowns, ... all these things were glorious, marvelous to behold, complex beyond comprehension, a mélange of sensory delights. And it was abundantly clear to me that what I could observe was but a tiny fraction of the richness surrounding these events; a richness the knowledge of which was held by various Hopi organizations each one secret from the others. How was I to *grasp* all this? As I was leaving, I turned to a Hopi man who had stood near me most of the day and asked him a question that even I knew was ridiculous, "So what does this all mean?" His response came quickly, and he seemed to think I'd find it adequate (I've always wondered why). He said, "We dance for rain."

But then this kind of response seems common to the whole field of dance writing. How does one transduce the complexities of movings, with all the accompanying multi-sensory elements few if any of which involve the use of natural language, into a statement of meaning? How does one give place (meaning, grasping, explaining) to what is primarily moving when the very distinction of moving, as I've noted, is being in no place? I take my granddaughters to "The Nutcracker" ballet every year. What would I say if one of them asked, "So what does it mean?" One might suggest that the very notion of *en pointe* in ballet is a sort of reminder of the magic of balance (a sense of being joined with place) as always paired with the flow of self-moving (a sense of transcending being in place) and that the art and power of ballet is in this interplay.[90] As Smith along with Frazer knew, with

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[90] At the risk of over kill I have the urge to say more. In ballet those moments when a ballerina balances *en pointe* seemingly still (without moving) is commonly awarded by audience applause. The secret, known to us all, of balance in ballet is the force of moving. Like riding a bicycle, we can maintain balance through the forward movement. From a biological perspective, the *en pointe* balance of a ballerina involves an internalization of the dynamics of moving. It is the trained tonus among a riot of opposing muscles proprioceptively sensed and maintained. Balance is the internal evidence of the necessity of self-

reference to things that matter most, there are no answers because there are no questions (at least none with any hope of being paired with a satisfying answer). This is the wisdom of the deathbed story (riddle?) of Gertrude Stein. This is Smith's insight on Frazer's concern with death.

All such efforts to articulate meaning as a way of responding to such profound and complex matters and to do so in a way that fully demonstrates why something matters to me, feel insulting to the subject. I think they constitute a forced false closure that no amount of academic effort would justify.[91] I don't believe that this frustration is limited to dancing and death; surely it applies to all things that turn out to matter enough to engage as one's life's work or for that matter even what we do any hour. For a while, and still occasionally, I attempted to make the distinction between meaning and the meaningful. Smith uses the term "meaningfully dwell" in his definition. The distinction, as I try to articulate it, has to do with halt versus ongoing process. To resolve that something matters because it holds a particular meaning tends to halt and limit the process, close it to future possibilities. The meaning replaces the subject. The power has been obtained; the goal is won; we're done. Next! Yet, I have attempted to imagine that an academic study might focus on the processes by which the quest is undertaken, the various ways that power is exercised, the range of factors that amounts to the experience of something mattering. In this distinction, meaning nails down, grasps, and halts; meaningful ebbs and flows, maybe even overflows with an ongoingness that is dynamic and full of surprises, enriching and enlarging over time. A crude distinction yet initiating a valued consideration.

Throughout his career Smith was never far from exploring his interests in jokes, jests, riddles, incongruities, play, and differ-ence (all terms he commonly used) and the exercise of a personal style that incorporated these dynamics in so many creative ways.

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moving. A demonstration of the dynamics of moving, the ongoingness of moving, through the impossible copresence of the appearance of not moving.

[91] Consider the efforts of Foster (1986) to expound on how one might write about dancing. There is a small field of dance writers that persistently struggle with the issue of transducing the moving dynamics of dancing to the fixed printed words.

He preferred questions to answers; the impossibles to things obvious; or the obvious that others tend to overlook. In following Smith, one of our tasks is, I believe, to invent ways in which we can advance these inspirations into academic perspectives and techniques. My efforts to follow Smith have moved towards the consideration of the nature of coherence and the impossible copresence of coherence with incoherence.

The copresence *coherence/incoherence* is, as I have come to realize, preferable, at least for me, to *meaning*. Coherence is a felt energetic inseparable from moving that has temporal and spatial implications. The term has to do with fit, yet the older Latin root indicates also hesitation. This root suggesting that uneasiness or concern is a clue that coherence is necessarily copresent with incoherence. Coherence is not a rational or logical condition objectively determined. Coherence is the felt knowing of relief, the relief of fit or rightness, if temporary, from the ubiquitous threat of looming chaos, incoherence. It is experiential, subjecttive, temporary, yet it occurs in contexts that can be described and appreciated.

I suggest that our most fundamental experience that serves as the model for recognizing the feeling of coherence, a feeling kind of knowing, is our experience that skilled or highly repeated movings feels smooth and natural and easy; *sprezzatura* as the Italians might term it. While the terms fit and rightness seem especially squishy, they are not without scientific support. Decades studying human movement led Nikolai Bernstein, Russian physiologist (Bernstein 1996, see also Geigenberg 2014) and more recently Daniel Stern (2010) and Alain Berthoz (2000) to appreciate that there are specific ranges and smooth patterns of movement associated with common habitual trajectories enabled as well as restricted by human physiology. For example, the movement path of the trajectory of the arm moving to transport food from a surface to one's mouth occurs within a narrow range of possibilities. It is a smooth movement that accomplishes a quotidian banal task. Jerkiness or the failure to deliver food directly and efficiently to the mouth—as in missing one's mouth and stabbing oneself with a fork or turning a spoon to drop food in one's lap—often indicate pathology. So too with walking. Certainly, it is common that cultures, genders, age sets, abilities, postures, and so many other variables are at play in the

formation of different kinds of walking, each nonetheless over time and extensive repetition comes to feel naturally smooth to the one moving. Jerky movement is experienced as cause for concern.[92] Recently when a physician asked me if I'd had any recent falls, I assumed this to be an ageist statement and I, perhaps a bit haughtily, asked her at what age of their patients do physicians started asking that question. She informed me they ask it of all patients because unexplained falls often signal a range of possible pathologies.[93] It is our long experience with self-moving, I argue, as subjective as it is, that provides the experiential measurant or model for feelings of coherence, fit, rightness. There is nothing natural or rational or ontological about the feeling of coherence, of fit, and this is the wonder of it; despite it not being rational it feels just-so. Yet, I suggest that it is the normal repetitive practice of simple human moving about experienced as smooth, as right, that provides the feeling foundation for all assessments of coherence/incoherence. Coherence/incoherence is a feeling kind of bodied knowing. While coherence/incoherence is based in body experience, it offers the corporeal basis for abstracted concepts.

The great advantage for understanding that coherence is not objectively or rationally determined yet is based in bodied experience distinctive to human biology, is that it offers the appreciation of differences from person to person, culture to culture, in what is considered and experienced as coherent or incoherent, without difference being something completely alien. We may appreciate that what seems just-so, utterly natural even rational, to us, may be experienced by others as the complete opposite. I suggest that cultural, historical, and person-

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[92] I've hiked a good deal in terrain that is uneven and often character-ized by unstable conditions. So often when hiking I have been obsessed with the marvel that, as we trek along, we are able to navigate obstacles, assess the stability of what we step on, and still chat with a companion. We rarely stumble. It is, for the most part, a smooth and nearly automatic experience, even if physically difficult. Then consider the trail runner who smoothly negotiates these routes at much higher speeds. This quotidian biological marvel is, I believe, the foundational experience for coherence.

[93] I recently read that among all the ways one might measure the potential for longevity is the pace of walking. See Bumgardner 2019.

al gestural practices provide varying parameters for coherence. This insight, not available to an objective of stating value in terms of meaning I don't think, is so remarkably important in enabling us to recognize that difference and otherness can be comprehended and appreciated.

Based on the inspiration that moving has primacy, our attention should be on matters related to gesture, posture, prosthesis which, taken together in complex pairs as well as a complex triadic dynamic comprise a nexus. It is possible to discern and articulate the context comprised of habits of moving that provide the measurant of the coherence/incoherence gradient. This approach directs us to the skills that cultural and religious traditions give folks to creatively navigate the complexities of life experience. In attending to gesture, posture, prosthesis we appreciate repetition, practice, accumulations of experience, and our evolved biology. We appreciate the experience of ordinary religious practice as important and valued every bit as much as (maybe more so) the so-called peak experiences we have so commonly exclusively identified as religious experience. In his 2010 lecture "'Now You See It, Now You Won't': Religious Studies over the Next Forty Years," Jonathan Smith included gestural studies as one among five trends he expects will emerge.

As we go forward, I think we must be careful not to identify moving with some peripheral niche locations where we place body and performance and practice. The focus on moving should relocate what have been considered lesser concerns as deserving much greater consideration. For example, we must recognize that reading and writing texts are also essentially bodied, performance, practice, gestured, postured, and have their own prosthetic reach, if somewhat limited.[94] Yet, more than greater attention, we must embrace what is surely obvious: religions as well as the study of religion are always already body, through and through.

The appreciation of implications of Smith using quotation marks to set off word "end" is his experiential nudging of us toward an insight. The "end" of the study of religion is always

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[94] We've wasted much of a generation on the struggle for what we have thought to be conflict between text and practice; an issue that wouldn't even arise if we allowed in a radical way the primacy of moving.

bound in the oscillating movement engendering unending concerns of it simply ceasing as deemed unworthy of public pursuit and our mistaken sense that our work is directed toward achieving some final attainable goals such as the articulation of meaning or truth or interpretation or translation. The very raising the questions of "end" is its own refutation, as it should be.

Moving and Materialism

Smith's statement, shocking to many scholars at the time and since, that there are no ontologically religious data shifts the identification of the materials that we are concerned with when we study religion to a consideration of the human encounter with matter as fundamental. Of course, there are behaviors and actions that might be designated as religious as well, yet how are they data apart from some material presence? I think some materialist studies of religion focus on physical features—inscriptions, location, proximity to other objects, iconic depictions—as the principal means to read these objects like religious texts.[95] I don't disparage these studies at all, yet I am eager to expand the scope of what is implicated by matter.

For many years I have been interested in the human senses and engaging more directly and fully the implications of our sensory human capabilities. For me it all started with color. Isn't it endlessly fascinating that color perception and naming is a complex affair that involves, necessarily, biology (the very construction of the human eye and the full neurology that the eye is a terminal to); culture, history, and language; individual psychology and taste, even health and acumen; skill and practice that changes color vision over time; and context (colors change based on what they are in proximity to and the light conditions—the brightness confound)? Color is always biological and subjective; color is always objective and of the physics of light. As I explored color, I began to realize that it is impossible to isolate the sight capabilities related to color from other human senses. Color vision, as other sensory capabilities, is synesthetic. We even name colors based on objects that have taste and smell

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[95] Lawrence Sullivan (1990) suggested this notion some time ago, suggesting that a canoe be read as a text.

and touch components as strong as, and inseparable from, vision. Orange is a distinctive color, yet the term names a citrus fruit with powerful sensory components beyond what we gain by sight. The fruit becomes the multi-sensory paradigm for the color. Reading and teaching on the topic "religion and the senses" regularly over many years led predictably to the familiar distinction I have explored extensively in this essay: movement versus moving. Human senses may be considered in rather objectivist and passive terms, yet also delightfully in active terms, in agentive terms of self-moving. Examples are seeing versus looking or examining or searching; hearing versus listening; touching versus feeling; tasting versus savoring. In the biological terms of proprioception, the active/passive distinction is one of the responsiveness to encounter in physical contrast with the attentive directed active agentive exploration of encounter. Passive versus active. Both involve the active senses. Both involve moving. Yet, the pairings arrange themselves on a continuum that highlights important and distinctive aspects of all, but particularly human, sensory perception. Renaud Barbaras has shown that perception involves living movement (what I call self-moving), yet so too the most quotidian aspects of perception and knowing are fundamentally a matter (ahem!) of the bodily encounter with the material environment.

While some neuroscientists, and quite a few others, place agency as being initiated in the brain—I think immediately of the widely cited Benjamin Libet (1985) experiments that so many cite as scientific support rejecting free will. Yet, the basic alternative that Libet's work is often cited to support—that is, that "my brain made me do it"—is actually a pretty crazy and untenable notion.[96] Apart from being integral to a moving body, the brain would be several pounds of useless tissue. Even its autonomic functions would be useless. And apart from the material sensory encounter with environment the thought functions we often identify as mind, would be without content.

I am not suggesting anything like a materialist reductionism; that religion and human behavior are adequately understood and explained on the basis of the needs of bodily metabolism (as

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[96] I have a rather extensive critique of Libet's work that I must save for another occasion.

Hans Jonas 1966 argued[97]) or the need for calories.[98] Rather, my fascination has always been with the appreciation of a materialist (or better biological) expansionism; that our sensory self-moving human biology enables (and necessitates) the richest of existence situated in a physical environment yet that opens to the limitless invention of idea and imagination.

All religion is materialist in this sense, as are all things human. The challenge for a tradition of study in which the subject is largely thought to be understood almost totally in terms of non-material abstractness is how we might recover what is most obvious, that is, that we exist as material beings in a material world.

André Leroi-Gourhan was a paleo-ethnographer notable for his research on spearpoints and other tools in early human history. His work is distinguished by his realization that the object alone was not adequate to speak of its full human importance and value. His approach placed the material object in the hands, literally, of its users, asking what gestural patterns and behaviors were involved in their use of these objects. It is the human gestural skills involved in the making of the object as well as its skilled use of the object that was important for Leroi-Gourhan (1993). Jonathan Smith's insight that gestural studies will be important to the future of the study of religion encourages us to look to Leroi-Gourhan and others (see Noland 2009) who have explored the richness of gesture.

Gesture in the fullest sense must not be understood as some physical movement substitute for a failed or impossible act of communication: the thumbing action of trying to get a lift when drivers of potential rides cannot hear the making of a verbal request. Gesture, in the richest sense, cannot be adequately reduced to the meaning implications of natural language. Gesture, more fully appreciated, is the repetitive practice that is satisfying in its own performance (autotelic) yet also cumulative as in the development of skills. In structure, gesture complements (is a perspective on) experience, both fully present; both accumulating in a wholistic sort of way over time through repetition. Gesture requires movement, self-movement, and

[97] This work is discussed in depth by Barbaras 1999.
[98] Or, God forbid, a "god-spot" in the brain.

thus it is necessarily of the body. And body is not separable from history and geography and psychology. Gesture is also always prosthetic in that it is movement extending out from the body both to inquire and to express. Self-moving as gesture is then the foundation to perception—that transcendence that allows us to connect with our environs in ways that result in affect, if also sometimes knowledge. Self-moving as gesture is the basis for growth and development. Repetition of gesture is never boring or redundant, for it is inseparable from feeling presence and the accumulation of acumen, thus also freedom and creativity.[99]

While self-moving is inseparable from life itself, the specific composition of gesture is acquired in a context of culture, history, and psychology. Gesture, as inseparable from perception, is powerfully influenced by environmental influence. In the context of community and culture we learn how to move in patterns that construct and enact identity. The accumulation of the acumen of cultural gesture is the acquisition of the skills that we use to practice and negotiate and develop the nuances of identity in all its complexity. Gesture is acquired and practiced in the processes of being who we are rather than in what they mean.

While we think of gesture in these terms mostly as appropriate to the acquisition and development of skill and acumen as in say sports or music, gesture seems of central importance to both the subject of the study of religion and to the academic processes developed to accomplish these studies.

Matter becomes religiously significant in the hands of human beings. We are makers and as I explore in considerable depth with many specific examples in *Religion and Technology into the Future: From Adam to Tomorrow's Eve* (2018) making is invariably interwoven with religion throughout human history even that associated with the forefront of modern technology. We seem obsessed with artificial intelligence (AI) and robotics envisioned by both scientists and in the imaginative consideration of artists as leading eventually to the making of a fully sentient, yet

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[99] For fuller discussion of gesture see the chapters "Moving" and "Gesturing" in my *Dancing Culture Religion* 2012 and the chapter "As Prayer Goes So Goes Religion" in my *Creative Encounters* 2019.

artificial, being. Almost invariably the contemplation of this achievement identifies the makers as gods. Such an identification reminds us that this idea is not modern but has a history dating from antiquity with such stories as Pygmalion and Galatea and a long history of automata.

Material, as considered to be religiously and culturally important, is never comprehensible apart from the relationship with self-moving human beings. Materials become interesting through being touched and used and engaged with gesture and palpated to engage proprioceptors.

Now You See It, Now You Won't

I recently had lunch with a friend who also has had a long career studying religion. We were both attending the annual conglomerate meeting of the major professional organizations that have to do with the study of religion attended by thousands of scholars. We agreed that there is some question as to the importance and value of studying religion; older men being honest. I believe there is value to teaching young people to engage in concerns common to humanity, to create beauty (which in some sense I believe possible for an academic), to do as little harm as possible to others and to the world, and to frame our efforts in a context of values greater than the insular measures small groups tend to form (measures that seem to mean the world to the members of the small cohort, yet not so much in the larger world). What we do should matter, should make a difference. Throughout my career I've constantly told students that their reading and writing and thinking and acting should always be done with the intent to make a difference; that somehow some way even schoolgirl/boy exercises must be training to contribute and to do so with intention and conscience.

For me, over the years and decades I have experienced a deepening passion for engaging my research in conversation with students and anyone else I can wrangle to appreciate the miracle that is being human; the magnificence of human biology that enables us to be imaginative, aware, reflective, self-moving, sensing, perceiving, questioning beings that can be characterized by having an aesthetic of impossibles. As utterly ill-fitting as it has almost always seemed to me, religions and the strange efforts

to create a properly academic study of them offer rich and endless opportunities for this enterprise; hopefully worth enduring the endless popular misunderstandings that seem always to accompany the profession.

When asking the honest question of the value of what we do as religion scholars, we might take refuge in the idea that we are isolated and don't have any real impact on the world; this seems pathetic to me. Yet, I believe that we must do what we do mindful of its impact, or lack thereof, intentional and unintentional, on our subjects, on those around us, and on the world in which we live. While academics, particularly in the humanities, often think their work irrelevant to the greater world (is this low esteem for the subfield or a kind of elitist arrogance?), there is, I believe, often a sense that we don't need to be so self-aware or intentional in this larger frame because no one outside our cohort reads us anyway. It has been a peculiarity of so much of my work over the years to see that even the most obscure of academic works often shapes, even determines, the course of history of their subjects. And that this influence is often not even known to contemporary subjects.

I recall a story of Ruth Benedict, an ethnographer, who was widely known for her studies of the Pima (Tohono O'odham) in southern Arizona. She retired to Denver and years later was visited by Pima elders who asked her to help them remember their tradition. In his book *Writing Culture* (Clifford and Marcus 2010) James Clifford tells a story of conversations with a person in a culture he was studying who, when Clifford asked his subject a question, sought the answer in published ethnographies. I know that Australian Aboriginal cultures were extensively reshaped by the influence of the writings of Spencer, Gillen, and even Eliade. I know that the Lakota were influenced by John Neihardt's romanticized book about Black Elk. And on and on. As I have written before, I don't believe that we should treat our subjects (even if historically and geographically greatly removed) as mere objects or as totally isolated from us. Rather I believe that our studies should and are, like it or not, always creative encounters. What should distinguish the academic enterprise in these encounters is that we should take the responsibility for creating and changing and impacting our subject of study in our encounter (and I think this creative process is surely why we do

what we do) and we must take the responsibility that comes with the awareness that we have an impact on our subjects and the world. Tylor often directed Spencer to get Gillen to come up with a "primitive" example to support the advancement of his theories, yet our real subjects are not mere exempla to be concocted and adjusted solely for our own academic ends. In a way, the distinction that Justice Clark made is an impossible one however appropriately directed.

As Smith reminded us, religion (singular) is the invention of the scholar and as such meets primarily the needs and interests of the scholars and their (our) cultural, historical, and personal interests. We invent religion as a comparative academic category that we might better comprehend and appreciate what it means to be human. There may well be tensions, incongruities, incompatibilities, irreconcilabilities between our study of religion and the religious worldviews of those we study. An ongoing creative encounter. Yet, our invention of religion for our (western intellectual and cultural) interests is important because it shares broader folk interests in what constitutes a rich understanding of the modern folk category religion.

Frazer spent more than twenty-five years transcribing and reinventing cultural exempla into categories and classifications. Smith's study of Frazer held that, at least on a certain level, Frazer pursued his work with no question in mind, thus he could find no answers. Yet, Smith's long and detailed study found that Frazer was influenced by the study of his subjects (the Primitive as identified in one instance) and that he was at some level motivated by his own concerns with death (the most personal and existential concerns with his own death). Yet, I think few of us would be able to pick up Frazer's massive work and, without Smith's guidance and insights, ever be able to find these concerns to be fundamental to Frazer. Smith showed repeatedly that Frazer was never clear or consistent about what he was doing in this massive work; any self-consciousness was at best vague and constantly shifting.

Smith's half century of academic writing and teaching can be easily shown to have been directed toward many specific issues (those distinctive to a subfield), toward the broader academic concerns of method and pedagogy, toward exemplifying the richness and profundity of human beings as manifest in the

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terms we label religion, and certainly also regularly to engage what must be the fundamental markers of a proper academic study of religion. Burton Mack articulated a number of these as characterizing his first encounter with Smith.

> No ontologized Sacred. No divine agency. No dramatic breakthrough events, whether primordial or personal. No romanticism. No mysticism. No otherworldly symbolism. Instead, human ingenuity, taking note of situations, crafting languages, constructing grammars, working with symbol systems, manipulating displacements, marking icons, attending to collective ratiocination, deciding upon strategies of application, rules of exegesis, classification, comparison, structural social and imaginary world-building (Mack 2008: 299.

A proper academic study is a human and hopefully a humane study; religion is through and through comprised of actions of human ingenuity, the inventions of human imagination. There is no presumption of or primacy to anything identified as sacred or divine; these categories and labels designate products of human inventiveness. How they come to be and how they serve human interests is an important part of a proper academic study of religion. A proper academic study does not presume some breakthrough events (events initiated beyond human reality); such events whether personal or posited as primordial, are the results of ongoing human creativity. There is nothing special (mystical or romantic or good) about religion (nothing *sui generis*); indeed, these standards are based in a specific cultural history. Religion is always already body, always already material, always already self-moving. For religion to be cultural and historical it must occur in bodies that are distinct in always being located some where some time. For religion to be understood in terms of human ingenuity it must be also biological (in the broadest sense of the term) that we might understand the evolved capacities that distinguish humans among the great family of animate organisms. To develop a proper academic study of religion on the premise that humans are bodies allows the study to at once be relevant to all human beings and to appreciate the distinctiveness and difference of specific individuals and groups.

Smith's Golden Bough

Titles were a persistent mode in which Smith manifested what I feel are the most pervasive, if also often tacit, of his insights and recommendations. The title of his great Frazer work was *The Glory, Jest, and Riddle: James George Frazer and The Golden Bough*. The title itself is a riddle. How do glory and jest relate? Does Frazer's work somehow constitute a jest of great quality and insight or precipitating wonderful laughter? Is Frazer's work somehow all these things if not simultaneously so? Then in the subtitle Smith does not say *Frazer's The Golden Bough*; he conjoins them. Is Smith's topic then the relationship between an author and his book? Like Smith's dissertation, his title raises more questions, and questions that have the style of riddle, than he answers.

The one article Smith published on his Yale dissertation drew on a phrase found in the darkest and most enigmatic line in a centuries-old, yet well known, lullaby that held the single word, bough, in common with his Frazer dissertation as well as Frazer's own title (whether it was his actual topic throughout, and it was not). I looked at a history of the way the lyrics of this lullaby have appeared over time and clearly it is the darkness and enigmatic character of that particular line that is so often changed. What child could be lulled into peaceful sleep by the line "when the bough breaks the cradle will fall and down will come baby cradle and all"?[100] And then Smith's very subject in his dissertation often drew on the same riddling style. The title of his Chapter IV of Part I is "No Answers, No Questions." This title draws on the famous deathbed scene of Gertrude Stein. It relates that Frazer's work has potential flaws because it was driven by no questions; thus, it arrived at no answers. Yet, we know that Smith always preferred questions to answers anyway. Furthermore, the coincidence of this anecdote being on the occasion of death—the time when one would hope for the

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[100] Ha! Well actually "most babies" is the answer. But this too is an insight into Smith's riddle. Babies are lulled to sleep by the repetitive rhythms of the human singing voice. The lullaby is to the one sung to not a message, but a gestural practice, a repetitive performance. It works not because of what it says or means, but because of its performance in the context of bedtime rituals. And it works for big babies as well.

right questions and answers—correlates with the deeply engaged concerns that Frazer pursued throughout his work, how to defeat death with death? This seeming paradox is the basis for the riddle of agricultural religions with their harvesting and sowing ritual cycles; as it is also that of the Christ Event, the foundation of Christianities.

Smith titled the entire first part of his dissertation, comprised of four chapters, "*Homo ludens*: Frazer as play." The Latin word *ludens* is the present active participle of the verb *ludere* which itself is cognate with the noun *ludus*. *Ludus* has no direct equivalent in English, as it simultaneously refers to sport, play, school, and practice. Johan Huizinga published a book in 1944 titled *Homo Ludens* that, curiously, Smith does not include in his bibliography. I spent decades studying play and, while so many find Huizinga's work the principal authority on play, I always found it to be flawed (ego driven flaunting of knowledge of intellectual history) and his definitional statements on play to be vague and uninteresting. However, the term *ludens* itself is fascinating in that it not only includes play, but also implicates school and practice. I have attempted to understand Frazer's more than quarter century of highly repetitive labor in terms of the gestural practice that creates the school (academic) acuity that can eventually lead to the graceful practice of intellection. In the final section of Smith's dissertation titled "Frazer Redivivus?" The term redivivus means come back to life or be reborn. Throughout the entire long first parts of Smith's dissertation Smith appears to kill Frazer and his work; seemingly trashing it (him) in often the harshest terms. It is also easy to read his "When the Bough Breaks" article as evidence of the same destruction of Frazer. Yet, it seems that in this last section Smith is demonstrating the principle Frazer was so interested in, overcoming death with death. In this last section, Smith brings Frazer's work back to life, he rebirths it, resurrects it and Frazer too. Smith attests to the possibility of the outcomes of Frazer's repetitive work. Yet, riddling as always, Smith adds a question mark to the term redivivus, leaving us to wonder if Frazer is truly reborn.

The term play itself is a riddle. It so often implicates the light and unserious, the mere trifling at something, yet it has been at the center of serious philosophical works for centuries (See Gill 2000). In Friedrich Schiller's *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*

(1795) play is given the status of a human drive, yet it exists only as the third thing of the dynamic Smith labeled "the necessary double-face" and what I have referred to as both impossible copresence and an aesthetic of impossibles. Schiller's *Letters* were an elegant presentation of several examples of opposing and impossibly copresent forces or drives that nonetheless exist together and necessarily so, perhaps the most prominent of which are the "form drive (*Formtrieb*)" and the "sense drive (*Stofftrieb*)". He wrote, "a reciprocal action between the two drives, reciprocal action of such a kind that the activity of the one both gives rise to, and sets limits to the activity of the other, and in which each in itself achieves its highest manifestation precisely by reason of the other being active." (XIV.1)[101]

When these two drives are copresent and interacting in concert, Schiller says that a third drive, play (*Spieltrieb*) arises. Play names the oscillatory moving dynamic relationship arising from an impossible copresence. Play is a distinction of human vitality as Schiller states in this chiasm, "Man plays only when he is in the full sense a human being, and he is only a human being when he plays." And Schiller identifies this oscillatory moving with aesthetics at a time when the term was first being associated with beauty, "With beauty man shall only play, and it is with beauty only that he shall play."[102] The presentation as chiasm is an aesthetic that Maurice Merleau-Ponty would certainly appreciate.

And nearly two centuries later Jacques Derrida wrote of play in such a way as to leave play still at play when all else has been deconstructed:

There are two interpretations of interpretation of structure, of sign, of freeplay [*jeu*].[103] The one seeks to

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[101] Conventionally Schiller references are made by indicating letter and paragraph.

[102] For a fuller discussion of Schiller on play see my *Dancing Culture Religion* (2012: 127-137) and my *Creative Encounters*, (2019: 205-211).

[103] Given my focus on movement/moving it is perhaps significant that Derrida's translator chose the English word freeplay as the proper rendering of the French *jeu*, which has a number of game and play related meanings, yet in mechanics indicates a space between two adjacent parts to allow free movement. Indeed, the impact of Derrida's refusal to reject in the name of play both "interpretations of

decipher, dreams of deciphering, a truth or an origin which is free from freeplay and from the order of the sign, and lives like an exile the necessity of interpretation. The other, which is no longer turned toward the origin, affirms freeplay and tries to pass beyond man and humanism, the name man being who, throughout history of metaphysics or of ontotheology—in other words, through the history of all history—has dreamed of full presence, of reassuring foundations, the origin and the end of the game (Derrida 1970: 264).

Derrida rejects both interpretations of interpretation on the grounds of either one being, on the one hand, trivial and, on the other, that we must first "try to conceive of the common ground, and the différence of this irreducible difference" (Derrida 1970: 265). Even to choose play is to stop play in that it is halting, ending the freedom of movement. There is primacy to self-moving. While Derrida chose to express the impossible copresence in terms of childbirth and monstrosity, Smith chose jest and riddle. The play must go on.

Smith's 1972 essay "I am a Parrot (Red)" (1972) follows the comparative technique that he used so extensively in his Frazer studies, checking the cultural examples other scholars use to establish their conclusions considering the sources from which their examples were taken. In this essay, Smith focuses on the use of a statement attributed to the Bororo of Brazil to address a classic issue. Smith shows that as early as 1894 the issue of classification was shaped by the consideration as stated by Von den Steinen that "the Bororos boast of themselves that they are red parrots (Araras)" (Smith 1972, citation from 1978 reprint: 266). My concern here is principally with Smith's style of titling essays, so I'll not review the argument of this essay. I will say that there are clues he first learned of this example in his Frazer studies.[104] But to cut to the chase, when Smith checked even

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interpretation" argues for the endless continuity of oscillatory movement.

[104] The clue for this influence is Smith's citation of the Bororo example in Frazer as one of his initial examples. Given that this essay was first presented at an AAR symposium in 1971 shortly after finishing his Yale dissertation and it is loaded with footnotes from ethnographic

Von den Steinen's own text he found that the account on the Bororo is actually not relevant to the issue it was so often made to address. The Bororo statement was quoted in error. Smith also showed that a number of noted scholars had offered their own interpretations based only on their acceptance of Von den Steinen's erroneous presentation. We might then understand that Smith's use of the term red and especially his putting it in parentheses as a way of emphasizing it was as much a reference to the embarrassed color of the faces of these scholars as to anything relating to the actual folks in Brazil.

Yet, Smith is not satisfied with simply embarrassing other scholars; his principal concern is to engage a fundamental issue of a proper academic study of religion. As he puts it in his summation of this essay, "The history of the exegesis of the Bororo statement has driven us to raise the question of truth from which, as historians of religion, we have largely abstain-ed" (Smith 1972, citation from 1978 reprint: 287). While Smith notes that the scholarly history he traces in this essay is a "tracing of the history of an error," (Smith 1972, citation from 1978 reprint: 283) he nonetheless raises a concern that is never peripheral to the study of religion. How do we take as statements of truth those facts we feel/believe to be impossible? The Bororo say, "I am a red parrot." The Hopi say, "We dance for rain." The Christians say, "God is man, man is god, death is life eternal." The style of Smith's essay title echoes his principal concern which is among the most fundamental to a proper academic study of religion.

Smith's autobiographical 2004 essay (he calls it "bio-bibliographical") is titled "When the Chips are Down." In a way I think quite uncharacteristic of Smith[105] he opens this essay with an explanation of the title. He recalls that his colleague Mircea Eliade was fascinated that Smith tended to use the phrase so often in their discussions. Smith indicates that his first encounter with the phrase was his reading of Sartre's play, *Les Jeux son faits*

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sources for the Bororo, surely Smith's attention was first drawn to this example while engaged in his Frazer study.

[105] My suspicion is that he found his story of Mircea Eliade's response to his use of this phrase more important than the unartful explanation of the riddle. Yet, I find this storytelling evidence that Smith's seeming explanation is not definitive; that the riddle, the play, must persist.

(1947) noting that he understood Sartre's use of the phrase as a "gaming term that signals finality." His use he proclaims has "less urgency" having the connotation "when all is said and done." Smith says, appropriate to an autobiographical essay, "I want to turn the phrase on myself and account for my most persistent interests as a scholar of religion" (Smith 2004: 1).

At this point, in this essay that honor's Smith's life and work following his death, his intended understanding of the phrase is certainly appropriate. What I have done, in such a small measure, is to ask "when all is said and done (when the chips are down), what has been Smith's contribution?" Acknowledging my half century relationship with Smith, I have needed to ask, "now that the chips are down, how has Smith impacted my work, what has Smith suggested for the establishment of a proper academic study of religion, and what might building on Smith at this point entail?" Yet, to honor Smith, I think something might be said by considering his title apart from his explanation; surely this is what he would do. The phrase "when the chips are down" occurs, as he noted, in gaming contexts. Specifically, it is a term used in betting games like poker that use chips. In this context it can mean either the moment when win or lose is about to be revealed or as a sign of persistent losses. That is, when everyone has put their chips down for the bet, when all the chips are down, that signals the moment when winners and losers are about to be revealed.[106] It is a critical moment of tension related to an anticipated outcome that will have consequences. Yet, most importantly it is the moment before outcomes are known. Alternatively, the phrase may refer to the persistence of loss, as in one's stack of chips having dwindled due to repeated losses. Yet, even here, since there are at least some chips remaining, there is still hope; one is still in the game. This use too refers to a time of tension related to the pending unknown. Will one's luck change, or will one lose the last chips and go bust?

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[106] I need to note my awareness that the phrase can also mean "an initial commitment" as in putting chips down as an ante that initiates the process. To put chips down at this point commits them and the player to the process. This is but a different phase of the use I discuss.

The Cambridge Dictionary notes that the chips phrase indicates an occasion "when you are in a very difficult or dangerous situation, especially one that makes you understand the true value of people or things." As in, "One day when the chips are down, you will know who your true friends are."[107] After a generation[108] of placing our bets, of putting down our chips, of mapping our territories, of making and playing our theories, how much of the promise of Smith's work have we achieved? Have we placed a bet holding a promising hand[109] eagerly anticipating a windfall? Or have we experienced such persistent losses, given the marked decline of the humanities and religious studies, that our future existence is questionable? My sense is we are closer to the later than the former, all the more urgency in engaging the rich legacy of Smith's life's work. In doing so we might realize that Smith, via his legacy, hangs with us no matter what as our "true friend."[110] We must ask, "How might we both understand the core energetics and potential of Smith's program and insights and also how might we keep Smith in play and continue

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[107] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/when-the-chips-are-down (consulted 2/20/2019). Based on my sense of the field, limited admittedly to incidental experience, I feel that religion as a proper academic field is not in particularly good health and that, should we fail to recognize this, we'll also fail to appreciate that Jonathan Smith is a true friend we'll need to go forward.

[108] Setting the beginning of the academic study of religion as coincident with Justice Clark's opinion in the SCOTUS case Abingdon v. Schempp in 1963 and the end of the generation with Jonathan's 2017 death or his retirement in 2013.

[109] I can't pass by the opportunity to note how this "hand" metaphor, a collection of cards being referred to by the human appendage we use to hold these cards. Elsewhere—Sam Gill, "Thumbelina's Severed Head," *Religion and Technology*—I have considered the importance of the evolutionary development of the human hand with its distinctive opposable thumb—even the existence of our thumbs—as fundamental to the evolution of the large human brain that is capable of metaphor. This is an example of an impossible copresence; a hand is not a collection of playing cards, yet it is.

[110] Abundant evidence is the experience I share with many longtime readers of Smith. Each reading reveals new and unexpected insights and inspirations seemingly overlooked on earlier readings.

his work far beyond the explicit confines of his own specific cultural, historical, phenomenological, and theoretical studies?"

Smith used another gaming reference in a 2010 lecture at the University of Colorado. I was thrilled that he was invited to deliver a lecture in one of the university's most prestigious lecture series, the Cox Family Lecture.[111] Also, at my urging, I wanted to take advantage of Smith's career-long history in the study of religion in a sort of Janus exercise of standing in the doorway looking back forty years as the background and context for a projection forward through the next forty years. Smith chose a title with another gaming reference, "'Now you see it, now you won't': Religious Studies over the Next Forty Years." Some of my colleagues were opposed to Smith's title and wanted to ask him to change it. Their concern was that the title seemed to suggest that the study of religion might not exist in the future. In discussing the title with me, Smith said it was inspired by his remembering the time he spent in New York City parks watching the play of the gambling game three cup monte, also known as the shell game. A pea is placed under one of three half shells and after moving them around in patterns the game master shows that the pea remains under the shell where we saw it put. "Now you see it!" But then after further moving the shells around the player is asked, with his/her bet down, to indicate which shell covers the pea. Invariably the player gets it wrong. "Now you won't!"[112] Smith's lecture reviewed the past study of religion and looked to its future, yet he did not explain the riddle or his use of it. As usual, he leaves it, as also the future of the study of religion, to us, to provoke us.[113] Is the future of the

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[111] See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lfuypty7LGw

[112] I find of interest Smith's choice of the word "won't" rather than "don't". "Won't" seems more definitive to me than "don't" indicating that this game is "fixed" to assure that the player loses. Indeed, the game is often considered a scam. This word choice too is a jest of sorts. Does it not suggest that Jonathan is assured that we students of religion are destined to fail? Perhaps that we are engaged in a scam? But then we don't know quite what role the study of religion plays in this analogy.

[113] Indeed, some of my colleagues were disturbed at the implication of the end of religious studies and, in a faculty meeting, discussed asking Jonathan to change his title. I'm rather certain he would not have

study of religion and its emerging scholars, the pea, the game master (*magister ludi*), the obscuring shells, or the player? Is the future study of religion, as related to the past, a game of deception? a sleight-of-hand illusion? or, something we will most always fail to successfully locate? In considering Smith's title, it is difficult to avoid some sense of anxious tension related to the current unfolding of the field of study; it seems unavoidable that Smith might well have been suggesting that after all of our moving things around for forty years, we've lost the object we thought we were tracking.[114]

My career spans almost precisely the period in which religion studies were mandated to become something other than an intellectual aspect of the religious study of a particular religion; that religion study had to be invented in such a way appropriate a modern secular academy. I believe that reading and rereading all of Jonathan Smith's works, engaging the effort to identify and follow not only his specific examples and models but also his style and the general implications of his persistent concern with the necessary double-face, and taking seriously his repeated warnings that we have yet to develop a proper academic study of religion are essential to the very survival of this study and also to the inspiration for the development of the remarkable potential the field promises.

changed his title even if asked, which fortunately didn't occur. During the discussion none of the faculty seemed aware that it referenced the shell game or that it had anything to do with jokes, jests, or riddles. In my experience, Jonathan was completely happy to lay a joke or jest that might never be discovered. In the faculty discussion I chose not "spill the beans."

[114] Or, to maintain one possibility, that in a postmodern world, we have only the illusion (a hyperreal pea) that we have a subject about which we might have valued questions with possible significant answers. No answers; no questions.

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Jonathan Z. Smith
and the Necessary Double-face[115]

The University of Chicago. Fifty years ago. Jonathan arrived from the University of California at Santa Barbara; I from Wichita Kansas.[116] As new faculty, Jonathan was a bright young star widely recognized among religion scholars. As a new student, I had been a corporate research analyst with degrees in mathematics and business with virtually no understanding of religion or its academic study.[117] Given my choice to study

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[115] In Emily D. Crews and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Remembering J. Z. Smith: A Career and its Consequences* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishers, 2020), 100-108.

[116] My memory of the date was somewhat fuzzy about my first meeting with Jonathan. I'd initially thought that it was likely in the Winter or Spring terms 1968. My first term at Chicago was Fall, 1967. Pete Grieve's biographical memorial, "Jonathan Z. Smith (1938-2017): The College's Iconoclastic, Beloved, Chainsmoking Dean" (2018), provides evidence in the form of a letter from Jonathan to Mircea Eliade dated June 4, 1968, informing him that he would be joining the University of Chicago faculty in the Fall term. This paper, presented in November 2018, would then bear out that it was precisely 50 years ago that I first met Jonathan.

[117] Given my background in math and business, for years my admission to the Divinity School would be an unexplained mystery. I frankly knew nothing of the University of Chicago, its Divinity School, the study of religion, or much of anything beyond math and business. Many years later it finally dawned on me that I was surely accepted only because Justice Clark's opinion in the US Supreme Court case Abington v Schempp (in 1963) had initiated a vast expansion of departments of religion; the growth was from only 25 departments in 1960 to 173 by 1966 (see Smith 2004: 55). I finally realized that most

Native Americans and, eventually, dancing and technology, it may seem odd that Jonathan would be the most important person to my studies over these fifty years, yet that has been my great fortune.

Smith's Frazer Studies

The year I finished my Ph.D., 1973, I read Jonathan's article "When the Bough Breaks" published that year in the *History of Religions* (Smith 1973, reprinted in Smith 1978). I had taken many a course from Jonathan, including one that required reading much of Erwin Goodenough's ten-volume *Jewish Symbols*; yet Jonathan had, in my memory, referred only infrequently to Frazer. I'm not sure that I was aware that Smith had written his Yale dissertation on Frazer titled, *The Glory Jest and Riddle: James George Frazer and "The Golden Bough"*, finished in 1969. Reading "When the Bough Breaks" I was amazed by Smith's Frazer studies, as I came also to appreciate the scale of Frazer's work; the third edition, comprised of a dozen green volumes, cites five thousand sources, and includes some one hundred thousand cultural examples. Smith's article suggested that he had done the impossible work of critically checking the bulk of Frazer's examples against Frazer's own sources; a work that should have taken a lifetime.

Most curious to me was Smith's conclusion:

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any warm body with a Ph.D. could find a position in one of these new departments. I was a warm body; nothing more. Yet I now also recognize that one of the long-term advantages I might have had with my strange background is that I wasn't seminary-trained or even religious. I was as close as one might find to *tabula rasa* for an academic study of religion. And, while I've spent my life in the study of religion, I've never felt I fit. My advantage, as I now might attempt to see it, if desperately so, accidentally coincided with Jonathan's lifelong effort to chart a proper academic study of religion. Such a study, distinctive to the modern secular academy, had to be independent of seminary preparations, religious beliefs, or even necessarily by the scholars in the field being religious. These criteria, plus knowing almost nothing, described me.

Frazer appears to have answered his two questions,[118] although we may judge his answers to be failures…. The original purpose of the book[119] was not accomplished…. There have been no answers because there have been no questions…. The *Bough* has been broken and all that it cradled has fallen. It has been broken not only by subsequent scholars, but also by the deliberate action of its author. (Smith 1978: 238-9)

Jonathan leaves his readers with a multi-layered riddle. Why would Frazer spend more than twenty-five years on a project intending it to fail? Why would Jonathan spend six years source-checking and analyzing Frazer to confirm the scale of his failure? What is broken? Is it specifically Frazer's scholarship, the comparative enterprise, the academic study of religion, or the whole academy?

Two years later, in 1975, at the national meeting of the American Academy of Religion (AAR), I ran across Jonathan at a social gathering in the Chicago Hilton. When I asked him about his Frazer riddle, he launched a rant about the world having seen enough of his Frazer work. He told me that he had liberated the copies of his dissertation from the library at Yale and that he had instructed the dissertation reprint folks not to make any reprints. Then the conversation shifted to other topics.[120]

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[118] The first extended section of Smith's "When the Bough Breaks" is devoted to what Frazer indicated in each of the editions of *The Golden Bough* as his core concerns. While Smith shows that Frazer's concerns grew, shifted, and radically changed from edition to edition, he nonetheless continued to state his purpose as answering the two questions "Why had the priest of Nemi (Aricia) to slay his predecessor? And why, before doing so, had he to pluck the Golden Bough?" (Smith 1978: 208-12).

[119] Smith's reading of the first edition of *The Golden Bough* found that Frazer stated his purpose as answering the question of "the meaning and origin of an ancient Italian priesthood" (Smith 1978: 208) and to "explain a single rule of an ancient Italian priesthood" (Smith 1978: 211-12).

[120] Jonathan sometimes gave me a rundown on what treasures of connection he'd found in the local Yellow Pages in his hotel room. Such things endlessly fascinated him. The near disappearance of Yellow Pages is something likely few other than Smith lamented.

Happily, I soon acquired a copy of Jonathan's dissertation and, should you be curious, it is still available. I read the work and, comparing it with his article, "When the Bough Breaks," discovered that the article was an abridged presentation of Part I "*Homo ludens*, Frazer as Play" with emphasis on Chapter Four, "No Answers, No Questions."[121]

When Smith published his first collection of essays in 1978 (completed in 1976), *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religion*, he included "When the Bough Breaks" but added an Afterword. The riddle of the 1973 publication was compounded, perhaps turned into a joke, by the following statement in this Afterword.

> I had originally intended a companion piece to this essay[122] accounting for the reasons that Frazer chose to make his central work a joke. It was to argue that Frazer, in his researches, encountered the Savage which put the axe to his Victorian confidence in Progress and, in his studies of dying gods and kings, was brought up short before the absurdity of death. The history transcended— namely death, "no figurative or allegorical death, no poetical embroidery thrown over the skeleton, but the real death, the naked skeleton" (GB³, Vol. VII, p. vi). And, in the face of this "real death," one can only act absurdly, or, to put it another way, all action is joke. (Smith 1978: 239)

The joke that is the deliberate failure is linked with Frazer's existential concern about death, the real death, his death, death as an aspect of being human. *The Golden Bough* was, Jonathan showed, no merely academic objective exercise; it was also a sustained effort by Frazer to come to terms with his personal existential concerns.

And then Jonathan concludes his provocative Afterword with this:

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[121] Smith indicated (2004: 38 n. 29) that he understood it to be an abridged version of Part I.

[122] It would have been based on the fifth and final chapter, "The Pattern of Divine Kingship," of his dissertation's Part II, "*Rex Sacrorum* [Sacred King]," dealing largely with the African evidence related to the killing of the sacred or divine king.

> I would not wish "When the Bough Breaks" to be misunderstood. Frazer, for me, becomes the more interesting and valuable precisely because he deliberately fails. (Smith 1978: 239)

Over the decades I have often reflected on Jonathan's Frazer writings and, as my own work has developed almost always in conversation with Smith's work, I increasingly came to believe that what is deeply important in the accumulated body of his work has its origins in his study of Frazer.

Smith and a Proper Academic Study of Religion

As I look at Jonathan's work today it seems that he regularly presented examples and principles aimed at establishing a proper[123] academic study of religion, yet I believe his work has yet to be adequately understood or engaged; and the field has yet to appropriately establish itself in the secular academy. In 2010, referring to the founding events of the field in the early 1960s, which saw the US field grow from 25 to 173 departments in just half a dozen years, Smith said,

> The groundwork, it seemed to me, *then* was there laid for the development of a generic study of *religion*, but that expectation has largely remained unrealized. We seem still committed to the priority of species over genera, apparently confident that a focus on the former is the

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[123] I've found myself using this term "proper" to indicate an academic study of religion fully suitable to a secular environment. Certainly, academic studies of religion may occur in religious settings for religious purposes; this surely marks the long history of religion studies. I feel the need to include the term "proper" in reference to studies of religion in non-religious environments, like publicly funded colleges and universities, because I believe that most studies of religion that presently occurs in those environments either remains more appropriate to a religious setting with specific religious motivations or these studies are not adequately self-conscious of the importance of engaging the field-marking concerns, that is, what distinguishes and is essential to a study of religion as a human comparative intellectual endeavor. The distinction I'm making here is not new to me; I addressed it in "The Academic Study of Religion" (Gill 1994). Notably, Willi Braun and Russell McCutcheon use the term "a properly academic comparison" in their introductory essay to their edited volume, *Reading J. Z. Smith* (2018: viii).

route to a responsible consideration of the latter without, however, much reflection on how one sort of expertise might, in fact, lead to the other. (Braun and McCutcheon 2018: 126; italics in the original).

Smith refers to the field's trending development towards area studies (species) accompanied by a decline in interest in religion (genus) understood as a human phenomenon.[124]

In Willi Braun's and Russell McCutcheon's 2008 collection of essays, *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith*, many of their authors do little more than an obligatory mention of Smith. Other than the editors, it was Smith's lifelong colleague Burton Mack who engaged Jonathan's work in some depth. Consider this statement by Mack describing the first time he heard Jonathan speak; we should also recognize it as a list of key criteria for the proper study yet to be established. Mack writes,

> The effect was stunning. No ontologized Sacred. No divine agency. No dramatic breakthrough events, whether primordial or personal. No romanticism. No mysticism. No otherworldly symbolism. Instead, human ingenuity, taking note of situations, crafting languages, constructing grammars, working with symbol systems, manipulating displacements, marking icons, attending to collective ratiocination, deciding upon strategies of application, rules of exegesis, classification, comparison, structural social and imaginary world-building. (Mack 2008: 299)

Among the areas where Smith's technical legacy has yet to be adequately appreciated, surely comparison, which he referred to

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[124] Clarifying and amplifying Smith's statement in 2018, his editors wrote: "Another way to phrase Smith's point might be to cite the general lack of interest among the majority of current scholars with studies of religion (in the singular), understood as a human phenomenon, especially with studies that apply explanatory tools from the social and natural sciences, in order to account for the tendency to be religious, while also noting the obvious wealth of so-called area studies in the field, devoted to studying the history or features of the religions in the plural" (Braun and McCutcheon 2018: 126, n. 24).

as a "persistent pre-occupation,"[125] is the most important and pervasively applicable. Any proper academic study of religion must be located in an environment shaped by comparison engaged as an essential powerful method of negotiating the vast exempla tentatively identified by scholars as relevant to a study of religion. While clearly few scholars should, or even could, engage principally in global comparative studies, I believe that all religion scholars must be aware of what is at stake in comparison and how it shapes, although often tacitly, all religion studies.

Smith on Comparison

In my preparation for this talk I wrote a long essay on Smith's rich understanding of comparison. To honor Jonathan's style its footnotes comprise as much real estate as does the body of the text.[126] Because of its extent, I cannot even summarize that

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[125] In "When the Chips are Down" (2004: b) Smith identifies and provides an overview discussion of "Taxonomy and Comparison" as one among five "persistent preoccupations" (see 19-25).

[126] It includes these minimal concerns:

Four Modes/Styles: Smith's historical studies revealed for him four great classes of comparison: ethnographic, encyclopedic, morphological, evolutionary

Four Great Classes: cultural comparison; historical comparison; assimilation, diffusion, or borrowing; and comparison as hermeneutic device

Technical Requirements: Smith took pains to articulate the rigorous requirements for comparison to be a legitimate and useful technique or method. "Comparison is never dyadic, but always triadic; there is always an implicit 'more than,' and there is always a 'with respect to'. In the case of an academic comparison, the 'with respect to' is most frequently the scholar's interest" (Smith 1990: 51).

Naturalness: Jonathan frequently argued that comparison is a fundamental characteristic of human intelligence; thus, comparison is of the nature of the human intellect. Yet, he also held that there is nothing natural about the comparative enterprise as method; that is, in engaging the technique of comparison the scholar creates the terms and selects the exempla compared

Uniqueness: Jonathan critically discussed the common use of the term "unique," which he disliked, in the context of comparison; technically it means "one of a kind" or simply "incomparable"; a

essay, so I must simply cut to the chase and adumbrate what I find to be the core dynamic of comparison which was evident in Jonathan's Frazer study. In concluding his dissertation, the following statement echoes what he wrote in the Afterword to "When the Bough Breaks":

> What Frazer has sensed in *The Golden Bough* is what later philosophers have termed the absurdity of the human condition…. Striving to conquer death by means of death, man asserts the reality of death, its omni-presence and omnipotence, all the more strongly. It is tragic, it is comic, it is absurd….
>
> Frazer, as the chronicler of "these efforts, vain and pitiful, yet pathetic" [*Golden Bough,* vol. IX, p. 241], adopts the necessary double-face. (Smith 1969: 376, 378)

The necessary double-face—this, to me, is the core dynamic of comparison and much else that persistently occupied Jonathan. In other contexts, Smith used alternative terms such as "gap," "difference" or "incongruity;" also "riddle," "joke," and "play."

The immediate reference made by the phrase "the necessary double-face" is the inseparable pairing of comedy and tragedy illustrated by the classical "sock and buskin" masks of ancient

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discussion that he often paired with the claims for religion as special, *sui generis*, and requiring some special acumen, religious in character, to be even studied

Ends: Smith was concerned with the ends to which comparison is directed. While his technique is often reduced to the linear sequence—description, comparison, redescription, reconciliation —I think this the least interesting of his views on comparison (Smith 2000: 239). Smith was far more interested in jokes and riddles which have the character of persistence; they exemplify the necessary double-face

And it is the quality of jest and riddle—this necessary double-face, that, I believe, to be central to the most profound of Smith's imaginings on comparison—that has the most importance not only for a proper study of religion, but also for the most existential of human concerns: our facing death. I can here but sketch this notion focusing on Smith's Frazer studies. I cannot emphasize enough that I believe that the future existence of religion as a proper academic study depends on us paying very careful attention to what Smith offered.

Greek theater.[127] Through our evolution, humans have come to be distinguished by our *capability to hold together without resolution two things declaring them to be the same, even identical, while at once knowing full well they are not the same at all.* This structural dynamic is at the core of most things human: metaphor, art, language, fiction, myth, and ritual. Riddle and jest are pure playings at this impossible copresence. I call this structurality an *aesthetic of impossibles.*[128] It is also the forte of what we recognize as religion. Comparison, the interplay of things that are at once alike yet different, is the dynamic that transduces all these objects and artifacts into the actions and awarenesses felt as life, as vitality.

In practical terms, a proper academic study of religion cannot avoid comparison. Classification, definition, typology, terminology, data identification, discourse, perception, and advancements to knowledge are shot through with applications of comparison, if often implicit. While comparison, as it operates in metaphor and art, for example, will always be mostly tacit, there must be an explicit understanding of the technical requirements for comparison when used as an academic method. Smith's many writings show that comparison is not a simple linear method that leads from one point to another, from knowing nothing to knowing something. Nor is comparison a fundamentally rational objective method that assures definitive conclusions. Comparison is at the heart of the processes we

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[127] The sock and buskin are two ancient symbols of comedy and tragedy. In Greek theatre, actors in tragic roles wore a boot called a buskin (Latin, *cothurnus*) that elevated them above the other actors. The actors with comedic roles only wore a thin-soled shoe called a sock (Latin, *soccus*). Melpomene, the muse of tragedy, is often depicted holding the tragic mask and wearing buskins. Thalia, the muse of comedy, is similarly associated with the mask of comedy and comic's socks. Some people refer to the masks themselves as "Sock and Buskin."

[128] Notably the word aesthetic comes from Greek *aisthētikos*, from *aisthēta* 'perceptible things,' from *aisthesthai* 'perceive.' The connection with beauty didn't occur until mid-18th century, a connection that remained controversial until late nineteenth century. I like the idea that the impossible things are perceptible as in given some concrete perceivable forms; for example, gods as wise old men in the sky or blue many-armed figures.

know as both religion and religions; comparison conjoins things that are at once the same and different in an aesthetic of impossibles.

Smith gave full expression to his sense of the importance of comparison to a proper academic study of religion in the closing paragraphs of his chapter "On Comparison" in *Drudgery Divine*, where he wrote,

> Comparison, as seen from such a view, is an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstitution which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary. The comparative enterprise provides a set of perspectives which "serve different analytic purposes by emphasizing varied aspects" of the object of study.[129]

He continues,

> It is the scholar's intellectual purpose—whether explanatory or interpretative, whether generic or specific—which highlights that principled postulation of similarity which is the ground of the methical comparison of difference being interesting. Lacking a clear articulation of purpose, one may derive arresting anecdotal juxtapositions or self-serving differentiations, but the disciplined constructive work of the academy will not have been advanced, nor will the study of religion have come of age. (Smith 1990: 53)

Rooted in Smith's studies of Frazer, we must appreciate that comparison has the necessary double-face of being powered by the distinctly human capacity to say that one thing is another, yet what is important, what is essential, what is interesting, is that the one thing is not the other, and that we know it all along.[130] Such a structurality—one of play and joke and riddle—applies remarkably not only to comparison, but, writ large, to *religion* as we make the effort to invent it and *religions* as we endeavor to

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[129] His quotation in this paragraph is from F. J. P. Poole's "Metaphors and Maps" (1986: 432).

[130] Elsewhere I refer to this as the Ultimate Turing Test (see chapter 5, "Ava and the Ultimate Turing Test," in Gill 2018b).

observe and find ourselves abducted by them. Comparison, like religion, has an abductive quality. Abduction, as Charles Sanders Peirce spent a lifetime studying, is that feeling-kind of knowing, often described as initiated by the surprise of incongruity; it gives rise to hypothesis.[131] Comparison is an oscillating structurality that engenders fascination and obsession. It is the structurality of vitality itself, an exercise of life that fueled Frazer to spend over twenty-five years copying and arranging ethnographic data from five thousand sources into ever-evolving patterns that tended, over time, to be a repetitive gestural practice, each iteration an enactment of his life practice. It is the structurality that drove Smith to spend six years checking thousands of exempla presented by Frazer knowing all along that Frazer had deliberately failed; with each iteration of comparison attesting to the glory of Frazer's, and Smith's, jests and riddles.[132] Comparison, as understood by Jonathan Smith, is the magic of the necessary double-face, the impossible co-presence that might impassion an entire field of study to broadly offer insights and values to human cultures.

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[131] See my "Religion by Abduction" (1987) and "To Risk Meaning Nothing: Charles Sanders Peirce & the Logic of Discovery" (2018a). Pierce held that the methods of argumentation we refer to as induction and deduction add little if anything to our knowledge; both tend to rearrange what is already known. Yet abduction, the experience of incongruity, gives rise to new hypotheses. Hypothesis, best guess, once formulated, takes us to induction and deduction and the application of these methods eventually takes us back to abduction. Back and forth.

[132] It is the structurality that inspired me to go to Australia to track the sources of each and every word in the principal example my teacher, Mircea Eliade, used to establish his theory of religion and which Jonathan later would carefully criticize. It was a multi-year story-tracking project (Gill 1998) in which I attempted to trace sources back to an actual person place and time; knowing all along that the story was concocted.

"What the One Thing Shows Me in the Case of Two Things"
Comparison as Essential to a Proper Academic Study of Religion[133]

Entering the academic study of religion at the University of Chicago in the mid-1960s was not something I had long planned and certainly it was not due to any calling. As a student of math and physics who then studied business and computers and had a nascent career in business, I was about as far from prepared for both the University of Chicago and religion studies as one might imagine. It was only recently that it dawned on me that the only reason Chicago would have accepted someone so ill-prepared is that they were rather desperate for new students at the time. In a strange way my background served one of their criteria and that was that I was a stranger to seminary training. I was looking for a place to take a brief time out to contemplate my life course yet fully expecting that I would make a lifelong commitment to the world of business.

When I arrived at Chicago, I was a huge misfit obviously betrayed by the frequent naive questions I asked. I was also totally unaware that the study of religion in America was undergoing a remarkable upheaval and that my largely random selection of Chicago had put me smack in the center of the birth of a new era of religion studies in America; the establishment of what I now call a proper academic study of religion (see Gill, 2020).

What I also didn't know then was that in 1963 Justice Black of the US Supreme Court had included in an opinion a justifica-

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tion for the teaching of religion as fundamental to an adequate liberal education. The legal implication was that religion might be taught in colleges and universities that depended on public funding without violating the US Constitutional provision of the separation of church and state. The caveat was, as made clear by Justice Black, that religion could not be taught other than as historical and humanities information. It clearly must not be taught to influence the religious lives of students; that is, no theology, no bible, no church, at least as these had been central to seminary and religious education.

When I arrived at Chicago in 1967 it was gearing up to meet the enormous demand for faculty in the many new departments springing up in universities around the country. In a half dozen years in the late '60s the number of departments of religion expanded from 25 to 178. As a warm bodied person who would not be inclined to be theological or religious, I was admitted. I've imagined some admissions committee with a bit of humor joking about how an experiment like me might turn out. I suppose that I've persisted so many decades because I'm still trying to figure out if and where I might fit in. As I've watched the entire founding generational cohort retire or die, I've tried to assess what has been gained by this first long phase of the experiment.

This demand for non-theological non-churched scholars in mid-twentieth century strongly pushed the selection of faculty in American departments in public funded universities toward the study of specific religious traditions, especially non-Christian ones. The Protestant Christian heritage that was unavoidably a part of the study of religion would persist no matter what, yet the rise of the study of the so-called "world religions" was emphasized to be seen as properly legal and legitimate. The result has been the development of many areas of religion studies that have each developed over the decades with a tendency toward an insular character.

In the early phase in this American expansion there was much attention given to the rich European intellectual heritage for the study of religion. Certainly, there were extensive Christian historical and theological and philosophical traditions spanning centuries. There were also the vast relevant contributions by European scholars in anthropology and psychology and

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sociology and other social sciences. At Chicago, in the '60s, we spent a great deal of time asking many of the fundamental questions that had been developed by these European studies of religion: What is the essence of religion? What is the origin of religion? What is the function of religion? How do religions compare with one another? What is the definition of religion? What comprises a theory of religion? What justifies an academic study of religion? And, given Justice Black's writings, what constitutes a proper academic study of religion, that is, one conducted by secular scholars that is on a par with the humanities and social sciences and even the natural sciences? In my experience there has been a steady decline in interest in these questions correlated with the steady increase in the establishment and growing independence of various area studies of religion.

In making my own choice to study Native Americans I had to ignore the sharp warnings of everyone, yet it introduced me to the great issues of the social sciences arising in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries circulating around small-scale cultures distinguished for academic purposes by their absence of writing. I was regularly reminded that they have no texts! It centered me in the discussion of primitives (a term common then) and the archaic and magic and myth and evolution; it eventually led me to focus on body and action and dancing and moving and gesture. It led me to ground my study of religion on the biologically evolved distinctively human bodied attributes that I find essential to the very existence of religion. Oddly, as I now look back on this half-century, I realize that my default choice of subject area permanently entwined me with the formative and definitive questions for this new era of the study of religion.

Looking back, as I see the academic study of religion having developed most energetically into a collection of area studies, I believe my own work all the more important in offering some contribution towards what remains incomplete, even largely ignored, and that is the development of a proper academic study of religion (Gill, 2020). A study of religion is not proper without including the persistent question, What is religion? an obvious statement that nonetheless must be made. And a study of religion demands a robust general and comparative discourse

that includes both religion as genera as well as the intertwined insights gained by the many specific studies of particular religions or perspectives on religions, religions as species. Jonathan Smith, with whom I studied at Chicago, made this point in one of his last public lectures in 2010 saying, "The groundwork, it seemed to me, then [the 1960s] was there laid for the development of a generic study of religion, but that expectation has largely remained unrealized. We seem still committed to the priority of species over genera, apparently confident that a focus on the former is the route to a responsible consideration of the latter without, however, much reflection on how one sort of expertise might, in fact, lead to the other" (Braun and McCutcheon, 2018: 126).

Unfortunately, comparison has often evoked that earlier era, religiously grounded mostly in the Christianities, that compared whole religions one to another to demonstrate superiority and hierarchy. The often-confusing search for high gods among primitives was one such comparative strategy. So too the evolution of religion succeeding magic. These comparative concerns were prominent in the early phases of the development of a secular study of religion in the mid-twentieth century; one thinks especially of the contributions and influence of Mircea Eliade, also my teacher, to create patterns of comparative religion. Yet, as specific areas of religion studies developed, comparison grew increasingly suspect and avoided. There is little to no training for scholars to be comparative students of religion.

Jonathan Smith is one of the few scholars who has written regularly on comparison. While many scholars have paid attention to his writings and embraced the importance of compareson, few have explicitly engaged comparison very self-consciously or with much clarity. Despite Smith's several important writings, they did not adequately serve the broader field in establishing a clear and usable understanding of comparison. Smith's own writings may have contributed to the confusion. His studies assessed various modes or styles and classes of comparison that he documented across a wide swath of history, often emphasizing that they all failed in some respects. As his studies continued, his understanding of comparison evolved and shifted, perhaps leaving many of his readers confused. I believe that a more careful and nuanced

reading of Smith, supplemented by the recognition and examination of comparison as a distinctively biologically based human process developed across evolution assures us that comparison is fundamental to human ways of being in the world and, when formalized, it is a bread-and-butter academic method, even constituting the academic milieu (see Freiberger 2016, Freiberger 2019, Freiberger 2020, Gill, 2020, Ch 1). Yet still what is comparison? What does comparison accomplish?

Jonathan Smith died in December 2017. At the American Academy of Religion national meeting November 2018 (see Crews and McCutcheon, 2020), in one of the sessions that honored Smith I heard what I found to be confusing presentations on Smith's understanding of comparison. I was surprised to hear young scholars ask if there remains any role at all for comparison in the academic study of religion. To my mind, comparison is at the core of "how one sort of expertise might lead to the other," that is, how a proper academic study of religion exists. Yet, it seems rather evident that the whole notion of comparison, after all these decades, remains confusing and suspect to many in the field. My odd personal path in the development of my religion studies has not only persistently engaged comparison in my work, but it has also sought a fuller understanding of comparison as technique. My path has led me to contend that comparison as it is exercised by human beings must be understood as being biologically evolved and distinctively human. In short, comparison is the milieu of the remarkable abilities of human beings to transcend themselves in their acts of perception and their accumulation of knowledge and experience with varying degrees of self-consciousness. What is for the folk often tacit and taken for granted must for the academic be formalized and engaged intentionally and critically. Comparison is a mechanism of human creativity inseparable from the ongoing interdependence of coherence and incoherence. Humans compare because it is of our distinctive nature to do so. Academics hold the added responsibility of being self-reflective and articulate about the practice of comparing.

Enough general reflection: the historical context and the potential for comparison in the study of religion is clear. It is time to explore the energetics and dynamics we associate with the term comparison. There are many modes, styles, and ways

of comparing. It is not, as is broadly held, a simple juxtaposition of exempla to discern and describe similarities. Most basic, even essential, is the presence of difference. Smith said that without difference comparison could not be "interesting," as he termed it. More logically put, without difference of some significance, any appearance of difference would be dismissed as an aberrance, an artifact of manifestation; a difference explained away in preference to discerning sameness. This emphasis on similarity was Eliade's understanding of comparison, also prominent among a generation of scholars as well as the folk. It is familiar because it has been perpetuated through endless school assignments asking students to compare meaning mainly to find similarities. Our common compound phrase "compare and contrast" assigns sameness to comparison and different to another operation called "contrast." Smith noted that approaches to the study of religion are distinguished by whether one considers comparison as concerned primarily with seeking similarity or difference. This distinction suggests even an ontological and epistemological stance. Eliade's contention, as James George Frazer's before him, was to see difference as an aberrance due to history and culture that needed to be explained away by an incorporation of seeming variations into common universal patterns. Comparison then is but the method to assign exempla to known categories. Yet, as many have noted, this sameness is often won only by a heavy-handed re-imagination of the data. We ask, is it possible to find satisfaction in difference? Does not difference beg for explanation? Do we not feel the urge to deny difference? Yet does denying difference serve our advancement of knowledge?

In his most sophisticated discussions of comparison, Smith addressed this seeming problematic aspect of comparison when difference is foregrounded. He acknowledged that difference and sameness must somehow be held together, yet without collapse. Smith quoted Wittgenstein to express his view of comparison. Wittgenstein wrote, "And how am I to apply what the one thing shows me to the case of two things?" (Smith 2000: 40). Indeed, Smith held that the very existence of a proper academic study of religion depends on how we understand this question.

In this paper it is my objective to argue for a specific, yet rich, understanding of this seeming impossible copresence of sameness and difference by exploring its energetics and ontological and epistemological implications. I'll first make a few general structural remarks about comparison; then I will develop a theory of comparison by reflection explicitly on phases of one of my own academic projects in Central Australia.

As I see it, a major obstacle to an adequate realization of the full potential of comparison is our drive to resolve difference; that is, we seem to insist on explanation and reconciliation. In the formal environment of academic and public discourse, things are either true or false, real or illusion, yes or no, on or off, inside or outside, the same or different. In this respect we readily, if naively, identify our brains as being like computers based on binary options: zeros or ones. Yet computers, like electronic circuits, short out or fall into endless loops if encountering the simultaneity of on and off. We are more than computers; comparison is more than resolving difference (see Gill, 2018).

It is a breakthrough when we recognize that the simultaneity of *is* and *is not* is not only possible but also it need not be reconciled. This copresence of *is* and *is not* is actually a common human capacity that distinguishes us from computers and most other animals. For me, the quintessential example of this distinctively human capacity is the simple metaphor. Metaphor is learning something by equating it with another thing that we know all along it is not; metaphor is an impossible match-up. Decades ago, George Lakoff and Mark Johnson (1980) demonstrated that we can hardly make a single utterance without relying on metaphor. We do not use metaphor to resolve the impossible copresence of *is* with *is not*; rather we happily embrace this copresence of impossibles tacitly acknowledging this impossibility as its distinctive heuristic power. Language itself shares this seeming condition of the impossible. Words, spoken or written, are what they refer to, yet, of course, they are not. We cannot communicate in the stuff of objective reality, only in the concocted unreal signs that gain their *-isness* through persistent identification with what *is not*; that is, to hold as identical what we know full well are not. And so too for art, ritual, mythology, joke, and riddle; all of these are importantly

recognizable as distinctively human. We must also recognize comparison as underlying all these dynamics. Thus, we begin to grasp that comparison is essential to the distinctiveness of human perception and knowing.

We all understand comparison to be at a minimum the juxtaposition of two or more things for the purpose of somehow relating them. Smith, however, developed this understanding by declaring that there is nothing natural about comparison, meaning simply that the terms of encounter engaged by comparing exempla are brought not by the objects themselves but rather by the one doing the comparing. We understand this third term of comparison in formal terms such as classification or theory or proposition or hypothesis. This third term is invariably the invention of the comparer whether formally recognized or not. We sometimes informally recognize the importance of determinative terms brought to comparison with such phrases as "but that's comparing apples to oranges" (see Lincoln, 2018). Such a phrase seems to suggest that only apples can be compared to apples and the mixing is illegitimate. This phrase suggests an overriding naturalness to comparison that isn't actually legitimate. Apples and oranges are both fruit, both somewhat round objects, both edible, and so on. I'd suggest there are countless interesting ways to legitimately compare apples and oranges and almost all of them are more interesting than comparing apples to apples. Oliver Freiberger draws a relevant bead on Smith's studies of comparison in his discussion of controversy within religion studies related to homological (genealogical or of the same family, apples to apples) and analogical (related to environmental circumstances, apples to oranges) comparisons. He shows that postcolonialist critiques have been rightly skeptical of analogical comparisons fearing they might impose Western perspectives on non-Western cultures and religions. Yet Freiberger reviews Smith's discussion of the issue that argues that technically even homological comparisons are actually analogical, quoting Smith's conclusion "Similarity and difference are not given [that is they are not natural]. They are the result of mental operations. In this sense, *all comparisons are properly analogical*" (Freiberger, 2020: 50–53, quoting Smith 1990: 51; emphasis in the original).

There are many phases and understandings of comparison, and they all need to be carefully and critically considered. Rather than immerse us into utter abstractness I want to develop a rich theory of comparison by tracking various phases and aspects of comparison through a specific project, my study of late nineteenth century encounters of European-Australians and Aborigines in Central Australia. My concern is to both illustrate the complexity and richness of comparison and also to articulate, in ways usable to others, what all is involved in comparison.

Objective Limited Comparison

Let me begin with a use of comparison as a bread-and-butter workhorse of academic studies. I'll call it *objective limited comparison*. For decades, my encounter with the term objective evoked a screaming protest; it is a loaded word with unwanted baggage. However, here I mean it only in the most mechanical sense, that of fact checking exempla against their cited sources. A distinction of responsible academic work is the citation of sources. The copresence of the presentation of information and its cited source from which it is drawn implicates an objective comparison. Leaping into the midst of things without adequate preparation, doing so will clarify the technique of this kind of comparing while demonstrating its considerable importance. I used this objective limited kind of comparison to assess and evaluate a cultural/historical Aboriginal example Mircea Eliade frequently invoked as one of but a couple examples to establish his theory of religion. Here is how Eliade presented it in his book *Australian Religions*,

> Numbakulla arose "out of nothing" and traveled to the north, making mountains, rivers, and all sorts of animals and plants. He also created the "spirit children" (*kuruna*), a very large number of whom were concealed inside his body. Eventually he made a cave or storehouse, [in which] to hide the *tjuringas* that he was producing. At that time men did not yet exist. He inserted a *kuruna* into a *tjuringa*, and thus there arose the first Achilpa (mythical) Ancestor. Numbakulla then implanted a large number of *kuruna* in different *tjuringa*, producing other mythical Ancestors. He taught the first Achilpa how to perform the many ceremonies connected with the various totems.

Now, Numbakulla had planted a pole called *kauwa-auwa* in the middle of a sacred ground…. After anointing it with blood, he began to climb it. He told the first Achilpa Ancestor to follow him; but the blood made the pole too slippery, and the man slid down. "Numbakulla went on alone, drew up the pole after him and was never seen again."

One day an incident befell one of these mythical groups: while pulling up the *kauwa-auwa*, which was very deeply implanted, the old chief broke it just above the ground. They carried the broken pole until they met another group. They were so tired and sad that they did not even try to erect their own *kauwa-auwa* "but, lying down together, died where they lay. A large hill, covered with big stones, arose to mark the spot" (Eliade 1967: 50–53).

Without discussing motivation or context, which I'll do later, it is a common academic method to compare such a statement with its cited sources to determine its accuracy. This is one of the reasons that academic works include footnotes and bibliography; that is, the academic presumption is that other scholars can examine the accuracy of another's work and be assured that it is grounded in the real objective world beyond the academic's statement.

The simple method of comparison I used was to place Eliade's statement alongside his cited source to determine its accuracy. It is a fairly objective and limited method. We place two writings side by side, then compare the quotation word for word to its source to objectively determine its accuracy, and to note any variations such as omissions, additions, paraphrasing, and so on. This workhorse objective limited comparison is to juxtapose two things to determine differences. In this kind of comparison, we often begin with the presumption that we will find no differences, yet it is precisely the discovery of difference that is interesting and leads to further academic processes.

Smith's doctoral dissertation was on James George Frazer's *The Golden Bough*. At the core of his research, Smith used this form of objective limited comparison. The third edition of *The Golden Bough* cited five thousand sources from which Frazer presented something like one hundred thousand examples from

specific cultures and times in history. Using this method of objective limited comparison, Smith's work was, in a central phase, to juxtapose a great many of these one hundred thousand examples with the sources Frazer cited to determine the accuracy of Frazer's examples. Smith spent a good part of six years using this workhorse method of comparison; and it is a remarkable accomplishment by any measure.

Smith's results often took the form of a numerical, even statistical, accounting, for example, when he wrote,

> Frazer, in advancing his thesis of sacral regicide, lists seventeen African tribes which he claims killed their kings when they grew old, infirm or impotent. A review of his evidence established that while there were instances of regicide in all seventeen tribes, in eight of them, the "kings" did not appear to be slain for the reasons Frazer suggested. In four tribes, Frazer's interpretation conclusively holds: the kings were slain for the reasons Frazer postulates; Frazer's evidence can be augmented by more recent reports and his conclusions are supported by more recent scholarship. In four other tribes it is probable that Frazer was correct. He accurately reproduces the data, but there is not additional material beyond that which Frazer utilized. In one, the evidence was too scanty to permit evaluation. Seventeen tribes, eight of which are certain or probable, is about fifty percent average. On the other hand, subsequent scholars have listed another eighty-five tribes for which sacral regicide has been claimed. Only ten of these have checked out as being certain or probable (Smith 1969: 418).

Smith also used objective limited comparison as a fundamental method in his critical studies of Eliade's *Patterns of Comparative Religion* (1958). Another outstanding example of this style of comparison is in Smith's essay "I Am a Parrot (Red)" (1978) in which he collected a number of statements by well-known scholars on how to understand the Bororo statements proclaiming that they were red parrots. Yet in this essay his signal use of this objective comparison was to look up the source for this statement attributed to the Bororo of Brazil upon which he discovered that the original ethnographic source had been misquoted and that all these studies had relied on the misquote.

Returning to my Australian study, my objective limited comparison of Eliade's statement with its source quickly became complicated. My initial comparison had to be expanded as I recognized that the proper end of this objective comparison could not be satisfied by comparing Eliade's quote to his cited published source, but rather it needed also to include any and all documents that would take me to the actual Aboriginal people themselves. There is a complex problematic surrounding what it is that the student of religion studies: is it the texts produced by other scholars and observers or is it the actual worlds of real people, those named as our subjects? I'll not fully engage this important issue here, yet I felt my study demanded that I do all I could to reach the real worlds of other people, the Aborigines of Central Australia in the late nineteenth century. Eliade's citation was W. Baldwin Spencer and Francis Gillen (1927).

Spencer was a trained biologist, the first in Australia. Gillen was the manager of the Alice Springs telegraph station, with no academic training. Neither was fluent in Aboriginal languages of the region. Based on several months' field studies in 1897 near the Alice Springs station Spencer and Gillen published *Native Tribes in Central Australia* (1899). Gillen died in 1912. Many years later

Spencer returned briefly to the field and then produced a revision of *Native Tribes*, the book *The Aranda*, from which Eliade drew his Numbakulla example. As was the custom at the time, field workers took brief notes when they interviewed people of the culture of their interest. Then usually soon thereafter they expanded those notes into narratives that comprised their field journals. Manuscripts prepared for publication often drew directly from field journals. I went to archives in Australia to find all these documents.

Using objective limited comparison, I discovered that the example Eliade presented was largely concocted by combining materials from fieldwork separated by thirty years, reflecting material decidedly changed from the first edition to the revised edition, and comprised of information that in the cited source was separated by thirty pages. Eliade clearly concocted the most distinctive aspects of his example.

In contrast with Smith's Frazer and Eliade studies where he limited the scope to comparing their published examples to only

the cited published sources, I expanded the scope of my comparison to include every link in the chain that began with the face-to-face observation in field notes and ended with the published statement in Eliade's books. This comparative process included Spencer's field notes and field journal, Gillen's field materials mostly available through Spencer, the published book *Native Tribes*, its revision *The Aranda*, and Eliade's several quotations citing *The Aranda*. Not available to me were the draft manuscripts of either book as submitted to Macmillan in London, that I might have compared these with the published books. These manuscripts would have been valuable since Edward B. Tylor and Sir James George Frazer both had a hand in preparing the manuscript for publication.

Although locating and examining all these materials required extensive work and travel, the objective limited comparison method was used for all of them; it is relatively obvious and simple, if also tedious and time-consuming. I basically laid out each of the relevant sections of every source in parallel columns allowing me to trace words and phrases in Eliade's passage through this chain of sources. What I discovered using this simple comparison was a story, the story of many encounters: field workers and their efforts to describe and document, armchair scholars and their readings of sources to establish theories of culture and religion, scholars who sought to encounter the works of other scholars to assess the complex and subjective nature of academic studies of real people who seem somehow different. Objective limited comparison revealed that "There are no Arrernte texts independent of nonaborigines," (Gill 1998) yet it revealed that scholarship is a complicated highly subjectively motivated and involved human process. It forced me to ask, what are we academics about and is what we do even remotely legitimate?

Subjective Heuristic Comparison

In my careful studies of Smith's Frazer work, I often found myself pondering, What could he have thought to be so important about these objective limited comparisons that he would spend the better part of half a dozen years checking Frazer's accuracy in his presentation of thousands of examples? Same question for Smith's work on Eliade. And, come to think

of it, the same question applies to much of my own work. Why had I spent the better part of two years including travel to Australia to compare a single example quoted by Eliade in order to determine the extent of its accuracy and to describe the chain of its provenance? Why would anyone do such a thing? And especially when the results seem only to cast doubt on the whole enterprise by which I earned a living.

To address these ponderings, I need to reframe this discussion of comparison. Here the academic process becomes openly subjective and has to do with discovery and creativity; it also demands another mode of comparison. Let me begin with another story. In a book I published in 1982 with the offensive title *Beyond the Primitive: Religions of Nonliterate Peoples*, I had relied totally on Eliade for my discussion of this same Numbakulla example. I declared that Numbakulla was a deity, creator of world and people, who climbed a pole that marked the world center and disappeared into the sky. My innocent concern was to demonstrate the importance of a world axis (*axis mundi*) to religious people, something I believed my teacher Eliade had fully demonstrated. My greatest sin, among many, was perhaps to set a story event in the ethnographic present, which Eliade did at least once as well. I wrote,

> Baldwin Spender and F. J. Gillen, who lived among the Achilpa for a time, described what happened once when the sacred pole was broken. The people were very disturbed and confused and seemed to wander about aimlessly for a time until finally they all lay down on the ground to await the death they thought was to come (Gill 1982: 19).

After the book was published, I received a letter from a scholar who told me that he was using my book in a graduate course. He asked me to address concerns that had come up in class. Referring to my description of these Aborigines, some of his students had looked up my source, cribbed from Eliade, and found it different in important respects from my account and they also questioned the credulity that such folks would actually simply lie down and await death when they broke their pole.

This letter hit me like a ton of bricks. These students, I immediately recognized, were absolutely correct both in checking the source of my quotation as I should have done, and also

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in their questioning the simple credulity of what I reported. My reaction to this letter was immediate and emotional; that is, it was a felt response. In part, I was embarrassed that I had not done what I knew I should have, what my teacher Smith had trained me to do, but those feelings quickly shifted to a fuller set of felt concerns. While still processing my feelings, I was further stunned by Jonathan Smith's 1987 publication of *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual.* In the first chapter "In Search of Place" Smith's objective comparison of Eliade's Numbakulla account with his cited sources cast doubt on his explanation which was that this Arrernte myth was cosmogonic and a testimony to the identity of religion with the world axis providing orientation essential to life by means of access to god. Smith had done what I had failed to do, check Eliade's sources. Smith's deep analysis of a somewhat different body of texts was the basis for his alternative explanation that the stories offered "an etiology for a topographical feature in the aboriginal landscape of today" (Smith 1987: 10). Further he sought to develop rich theories of ritual and religion that concentrated on difference rather than sameness. As Smith noted, this Numbakulla example was one of but a few that Eliade used to ground in actual religious history and cultures his theory or definition of religion, a theory based on the discernment of sameness among all religious cultures. Eliade's theory of religion depended heavily on the accuracy of this Australian example. Smith held that, if Eliade had not accurately presented the actual culture he cited, if he had concocted in some way this example, then his theory of religion and the entire study of religion which so closely followed him at the time, would be incorrect. Even more broadly, if an academic could simply concoct examples to establish a theory, then wasn't the entire academic enterprise fraudulent or at best mischaracterized? How might one continue as an academic student of religion should these conditions pertain? My academic sins had placed me amid the conflict between my two academic fathers and also the struggle for what should prevail as a theory of religion and as the fundamental understanding of comparison as central to the field of study. One way or another how could I not, to Freud's delight, commit patricide? Today, from the perspective of many more years of experience, my choice was to construct strategies and modes of comparison that would offer

critique of both yet provide the context in which they are both honored. Perhaps causing injury, but not death, to both (See Gill 1998: 178–211).

This phase of the project was kicked off by the complex feelings associated with embarrassment, conflict, difference, and incoherence. Following Smith, these feelings arise from the distinctions of the presence of difference in the context of comparison. This mode of comparison, I suggest, cannot avoid being subjective, often frustrating, even painful. I call this creative mode *subjective heuristic comparison*. Smith's broader understanding of comparison is one that emphasizes difference. As I noted he insisted that there is nothing natural about comparison. We might contest this position by suggesting that items in the same species are by their membership in a common class naturally comparable. Smith studied extensively systems of classification including those of Linnaeus and argued that even species of nature are the construct serving comparison. I agree, yet I suggest an intermediate position by indicating that the extent to which a comparison is interesting is the apparent unnaturalness of the examples compared. Wherever we feel comfortable on this issue of naturalness, we must admit that comparison spawned by difference is inseparable from a subjective or felt experience. The energy of comparison, in this aspect, comes from the feelings of difference, incongruity, incoherence, surprise.

There is some redundancy in labeling this comparative mode subjective heuristic since the word heuristic suggests enabling one to discover or learn something, especially in a hands-on or interactive style. This mode is initiated more by prehension than by intention. It is the coming to awareness that feelings of difference and incoherence cannot be tolerated, or are at least uncomfortable, given one's understanding of the world or some significant parts of it. I argue that prehension, grasping, is rooted in the biological evolution of human beings explicitly marked by the interlocked co-development of an opposing thumb, upright posture, and a large brain. The common human notion of grasping concepts or significance or insights is, I argue, in the long history of human development inseparable from these biological factors. The technical term heuristic comes from Greek *heuretikos* meaning inventive, also *heurema* indicating an

invention, a discovery; that which is found unexpectedly. The sense of unexpectedness, or surprise, indicates the subjective aspect of discovery or invention. The heuristics or inventive embraces the biological basis in thumbs and hands in its implications of hands-on learning and that grasping requires thumbs. Subjective heuristic comparison then happens to us as much as something we make happen. It is surely inseparable from accumulated experience as well as the training that allows one to skillfully translate the feelings of surprise into more formal academic processes. These conditions and processes are, I suggest, at the heart of all discovery and invention, the core of all advances of knowledge. The distinction of the academic enterprise, as I will shortly discuss, is to seize such epistemological feeling events and formalize them in terms of argumentation.

I was painfully shocked, embarrassed, and disoriented by the untenability of my signal example, Numbakulla and the Sacred Pole, as establishing that religions are universally defined by the presence of a center that gives orientation to all life and access to the creator gods. My dis-ease was shaped by my reading of Smith's critique of Eliade's use of the same example. My experience of surprise led me to question so much of what I had believed at the time. I had to completely re-evaluate my Eliadian-based theory of religion which I eventually came to see more as an academic theology rather than an academic theory. I had to re-evaluate my understanding of comparison as finding sameness or connections, in order to pursue a richer understanding that demands the presence of difference. I had to re-evaluate Smith's satisfaction in depending on the authority of the sources cited rather than feeling that authority could only come by pursuing the chain of written sources to the speech and bodies of the Aborigines in Central Australia. I had also to question Smith's "alternate explanation" because, while it was initiated by difference, it sought finally to resolve those differences in an explanation based on selective and incomplete sources other than those used by Eliade that were themselves heavily influenced by Spencer and others to satisfy the needs of the early twentieth century construction of social scientific theory. Given the foundational and pervasiveness of these adjustments, I had to engage in the re-examination of virtually everything I had

believed and been taught about religion, about what it means to be human, and also about the very nature of the academic enterprise. It is no exaggeration to say that everything I have done in my career following this surprise has been shaped by my efforts to come to terms with the initiation of this process that I term subjective heuristic comparison.

Subjective heuristic comparison is, I believe, as much a process driven and guided by what I call a feeling kind of knowing as by some conscious purposeful logical technique objectively performed. Yet, I believe that it produces hypotheses that can be carefully stated, and it produces the impetus for specific techniques and methods that must be engaged.

The subjective heuristic mode of comparison is a jarring awareness of the potential implications of difference. It is the experience that what we have held as just-so, perhaps just ain't-so after all. It is inspiration born of disenchantment. I suggest that this feeling kind of knowing is a remarkably common experience. What is often difficult is for us to take this feeling seriously enough to allow the discomfort of incongruity to continue to irritate and motivate. Perhaps simply the gestural habits or skills we develop to navigate the complexities of life equip us with many strategies designed to quickly dissipate the discomfort of surprise and incongruity. Yet, discovery, I stress, is always won by training or otherwise preparing ourselves to not only tolerate incongruity, but also to place ourselves in situations where we are most likely to encounter it.

Whereas I perhaps put the cart before the horse above in introducing objective limited comparison first, we may now see that it is always brought into play because of the emotional demands of the subjective heuristic mode of comparison. I absolutely had to pursue the sources of Eliade's Numbakulla example in the most granular detail; my academic life and my professional integrity depended on it. I found that everything in my academic life was at stake. Of course, it wasn't a shift from one mode of comparison to another. There is nothing linear about learning and experiencing even in a formal academic environment. Rather, the two came together, however seeming-ly impossible, in an oscillating interaction that hummed at the core of my ongoing academic work. Hypotheses or best guesses were tested with operations of excruciating detail only to be

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modified with the subsequent additional rounds of continuing efforts with objective details. Situations that persistently engage this iterative process often do not cease for years or decades; the terms just modulate into different theaters and concerns.

Jonathan Smith considered comparison in terms of magic, perhaps more for provocation than to suggest it is a technique of actual magic. Yet there is something inexplicable and profound about all human learning—I'm thinking principally of conscious expansions of knowing. It requires that we transcend where we are and what we know and somehow incorporate not just information, as in filling up a cistern, but more so the integration of insight and perspective and understanding. The process is a gestural one as in the practiced acquisition of skill. We cannot live what we know unless we have integrated it into the way we experience the world. I imagine the interaction and interdependence of these two modes of comparison as something like a ratchet in which the interaction turns the gear just far enough for the next cog to be captured by the trigger. And while Smith also wrote of the "end" of comparison (2000b), in the view I'm presenting here, there may be phases of seeming stasis, there may be projects with specific goals that indicate an accomplishment, but perhaps not an end. I believe that comparison is a distinctively human biological whole-bodied process that can be articulated and engaged as a formal academic process essential to learning and also to teaching. In comparison there may be "ends" but there is no "end."

Appreciating this rich and complex ongoing process of comparison we might now come to imagine why Frazer spent decades on *The Golden Bough* without ever being able to quite settle on what it was he was trying to accomplish. We might appreciate why Smith spent years examining Frazer's work only to come to the position that he found Frazer interesting principally because he intentionally failed. And I can begin to glimpse what has motivated much of the work of my religion studies. I can also sense how it translated into being grounded in my decades of dancing and the rise of my increasingly firm convictions that it is our evolved human biological distinctive gifts that are at the core of our inventions of religion and our life so aptly exemplified by our penchant for dancing.

Comparison, Discovery, and a Proper Academic Study of Religion

A valuable resource to help us comprehend comparison, as I am constructing it, is found in the writings of the American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce. A persistent theme in Peirce's writing had to do with what I term his logic of discovery (see Gill, 2019: 197–226). He held that the scientific methods of induction and deduction do not add one whit to knowledge, both being operations to extend what is known to other domains and to establish the importance of given hypotheses. Throughout his writings he sought a third method he called abduction (a movement away from the center or interestingly kidnaping) or hypothetic inference. In pursuing abduction Peirce sought to comprehend how hypotheses arise, or how we come up with something new.

His genius was, as I understand it, to recognize that hypotheses arise in response to the feeling of surprise. Or put in the terms of my construct, the subjective response to difference or incoherence or incongruity. Surprise is, to use Pierce's term, a feeling kind of knowing. Surprise is the emotion of encountering the unexpected, unexplained, difference, or incoherence. Peirce held that discovery is initiated by the experience of surprise. This experience initiates a subjectively monitored process of iterating through a series of possible conditions to discover one that, should it pertain, might dissipate the uncomfortable feeling of incoherence. Thus, a condition that might diminish the feeling of surprise is a potentially worthy hypothesis. Hypothesis then is, as Peirce imagined it, the formalization of a possibility related to a feeling kind of knowing; the formal statement of a best guess, a hunch, a felt beginning of further inquiry.

This subjective phase of discovery must be paired with—indeed it gives purpose and direction to—objective and technical methods that engage data and formal logic. These methods, in the scientific realm, are known as induction and deduction. Induction is a logic of selecting data and organizing it towards the establishment of probable generalizations, whereas deduction is the re-organization of the terms of a hypothesis that are logically necessary. Both are objectivist operations whereas abduction, in Peirce's understanding, is subjectively based. Yet,

most importantly for Peirce, knowledge is not significantly advanced without both.

I'm suggesting that comparison as the interdependence of the objective limited and the subjective heuristic modes, is a specific application of Peirce's logic of discovery. The implication for the study of religion is that comparison is not an optional method to be selected and applied in some subset of circumstances. Comparison, in both the modes I am outlining here, is of the very fabric of human intelligence and, formalized as academic argumentation, is unavoidable in any proper study of religion.

In my experience, one of the markers of religion, as it has developed in our folk understanding over the past couple of centuries, is the plethora of situations of surprise. Religions are shot through and through with what I sometimes refer to as impossibles: human gods, mythscapes that posit eras and places that are incongruous with our quotidian world, death that is eternal life, all manner of spirits and ghosts and monsters and deities and devils and beasts. Belief is a religious strategy for dissipating the shocking and surprising character of these impossibles. Yet, I suggest that a proper academic study of religion must remain open to the surprise and incoherence of such impossibles. And from this openness to recognize that it is grounds for subjective heuristic comparison that includes the formalization of other modes of academic inquiry most certainly including objective limited comparison. The ongoing power of comparison is the embrace of the necessary and impossible copresence of sameness and difference. What drives us through projects and careers is the constant delight in discovering what the one thing shows us in the case of two things.

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The Glory Jest and Riddle
Jonathan Z. Smith and an Aesthetic of Impossibles[134]

Jonathan Smith and Mircea Eliade were friends and colleagues for years at the University of Chicago despite what would appear to many as their stark and contentious intellectual differences. They were both my teachers. Eliade died in 1986; Smith in December 2017.[135] In Smith's 2004 bio-bibliographical essay "When the Chips are Down" he explains that Eliade was curious about his frequent use of the "chips are down" phrase.[136] Smith often constructed titles around jokes and riddles and homo-

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[135] Smith arrived at Chicago in 1968, a year after I arrived. Eliade was there at the time making them colleagues for the better part of two decades. Smith was my teacher, mentor, and friend for almost half a century. Few survive today that can make such a strange (and wonderful) claim.

[136] This paper was originally prepared for a conference honoring Jonathan Smith "'When the Chips are Down,' It's Time to Pick Them Up: Thinking with Jonathan Z. Smith" hosted by the Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Trondheim, Norway, June 4-5, 2019. This paper turned out to be far too extensive for either presentation at the conference or for the publication of the conference papers. I wrote and presented a different paper, "Imagining a Proper Academic Study of Religion Inspired by Jonathan Z. Smith," in *Thinking with J.Z. Smith*, ed. by Barbara Krakowicz (NAASA Working Papers, Sheffield, UK: Equinox Press, 2023) at the conference retaining the integrity of this paper. I thank Barbara Krawcowicz and all those who presented and hosted that conference for their interest in Smith and perpetuating his influence.

phones and aphorisms leaving them without comment as enduring provocation should his reader take (or get) the challenge. In a rare exception he commented on his use of "chips."[137] Smith offered that his use of the phrase was less urgent than the usual connotation "when all is said and done" writing, appropriate to an autobiographical essay, "I want to turn the phrase on myself and account for my most persistent interests as a scholar of religion."[138]

There is no question that "when all is said and done" Smith's intention, as will be his enduring legacy, was to construct—through incisive critique, brilliant and surprising insights, and a vast collection of challenging essays—an academic study of religion deserving a proper place among the human, social, and even natural sciences. Indeed, more than a hint of the dynamics and importance of his program might be appreciated by

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[137] Smith noted his first encounter with the phrase was Sartre's 1947 play, *Les Jeux sont faits.* The translation to English is usually "the game has been played," suggesting "the writing is on the wall" or "the game is over." My review of a wide range of uses of the French term turns up a few that suggest that the process is ongoing, that the outcome is unknown, yet there seems to be a greater sense of finality than in the English term as I'll discuss. I would be irresponsible—or at least not consistent with Smith's love of all things footnote—were I to fail to acknowledge Friedrich Max Mullers' five-volume *Chips from German Workshop* (1867-75). Volume I: Essays on the Science of Religion; Volume II: Essays on Mythology, Traditions, and Customs; Volume III: Literature, Biography, and Antiquities; Volume IV: Essays Chiefly on the Science of Language; Volume V: Miscellaneous Later Essays. I once wrote a piece called "Chips from a Cyborg's Workshop" published online as part of a graduate student project. Seems that piece may have been now lost in the ether and I no longer recall what I wrote about other than that the title was inspired by the Max Muller title and doubtless Smith's reference to it … and, as would be consistent, I no longer recall where he made that reference. What I certainly didn't know at the time was that the cyborg piece likely foreshadowed my cyborg-filled book *Religion and Technology into the Future* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018).
[138] Jonathan Z. Smith, "When the Chips are Down" in *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004) 1.

considering the broader use of his "chips are down" phrase even as it varies from his explanation.

The phrase "when the chips are down" occurs, as Smith noted, in gaming contexts.[139] Specifically, it is a term used in betting games like poker that use chips that represent denominations of value. The phrase is most frequently used to identify the moment when all the bets have been placed, when all the chips are down. It is a critical moment of *excited tension* related to an anticipated outcome that will have consequences because one has "skin in the game." Alternatively, in a darker shade, the phrase may refer to the persistence of loss, as in when one's stack of chips has dwindled due to repeated losses, the result of foolish bets perhaps or plain bad luck. Yet, even here, since there are at least some chips remaining, down but not gone, there is a fragment of hope; one is still in the game. This use refers to the presence of *anxious tension* related to the pending unknown, the fear of loss. Will one's luck change, or will one lose the last chips and go bust? Fundamental to these usages is the presence of felt tension, anticipation, or anxiety, even, it must be said, as emotions that accompany addiction or obsession.

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[139] *English Language and Usage* reports the earliest published uses were sports related occurring in 1932. Their consideration of a number of examples led them to suggest the phrase "*When the chips are down* means 'the serious or critical moment'. It refers to the finality of throwing down your chips in a poker game. Before you do this, anything you say or do is just bluff or empty words. Your action of throwing down your chips commits you to an actual position. Thus, the action of throwing your chips down is the moment when you get serious." https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/54055/what-is-the-origin-of-when-the-chips-are-down. (consulted 2/25/2019) The phrase has also been used almost endlessly, with expansive implications, in memes on poster-style illustrations. See https://www.google.com/search?q=when+the+chips+are+down+meme&biw=1440&bih=734&tbm=isch&source=iu&ictx=1&fir=-h00WkFcdh74BM%253A%252CbPYSjU7ES2p61M%252C_&usg=AI4_-kTmo8g0-u_i1d5iyGkCdZ_-Pk-7ow&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjwvIKct8vgAhUL7J8KHQaQC6UQ9QEwAHoECAMQBA#imgrc=xm8GjcPH8OnyzM: (consulted 2/20/2019).

This essay title[140] is an apt way to focus on Smith's work in the broad and urgent business of assessing the status of the coming of age of a proper academic study of religion. I intend the word "proper" to designate a study of religion in a secular setting. The European study of religion predates the North American beginnings. A significant marker is the 1950 founding of the International Association for the History of Religions and its journal *Numen: International Review for the History of Religions* founded in 1954.[141] In North America, specifically the USA, the appropriate secular study of religion was articulated by Justice Clark in his 1963 opinion on Abingdon v Schempp. *The Cambridge Dictionary* notes that the chips phrase indicates an occasion "when you are in a very difficult or dangerous situation, especially one that makes you understand the true value of people or things." For example, "One day when the chips are down, you will know who your true friends are."[142] After a

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[140] My initial motivation for reflecting on this phrase arose when I was preparing for a conference titled "'When the Chips are Down': It's Time to Pick Them Up: Thinking with Jonathan Z. Smith". Given my review of the "chips" phrase, I took slight issue with the conference subtitle: "It's Time to Pick Them Up." I suspect the intention was that for the future health of the study of religion it's time to take Smith seriously and I couldn't agree more. Yet to stay true to the "chips" phrase, picking them up would be instantly declared illegitimate by other players since putting chips down is a decisive action that can't be taken back. We can't pick up the chips unless we are found to be the winner and, as certainly essential to my sense of the deeper implications of the term, it is first the significance of being serious by putting down one's chips and, following that, it is the anticipation, the tension, the risk, the anxiety, the emotion of having put down one's chips that is the most important, more so even than outcomes.

[141] Of course, the European roots of the study of religion, both religious and secular especially given the anthropological/ ethnographical contributions, date far earlier than the mid-twentieth century. One account is Walter Capps, *Religious Studies: The Making of a Discipline* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Publishers, 1995) that covers 200 years of this history, most of it European.

[142] https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/when-the-chips-are-down (consulted 2/20/2019). Based on my sense of the field, limited admittedly to incidental experience, I feel that religion as a proper academic field is not in particularly good health and that,

Smithian era of placing our bets, of putting down our chips, of mapping our territories, of making and playing our theories, how much of the promise of Smith's work have we achieved? Have we placed a bet holding a promising hand[143] eagerly anticipating a windfall? Or have we experienced such persistent losses, given the marked decline of the humanities and religious studies,[144] that our future existence is questionable? My sense is we are closer to the later than the former, thus the urgency of our collective concern. Here, now, we acknowledge the rich legacy of Smith's life's work. In doing so we learn that Smith, via his legacy, hangs with us no matter what as our "true friend."[145] We ask, "How might we both understanding the core energetics and

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should we fail to recognize this, we will also fail to appreciate that Jonathan Smith is a true friend we need to go forward.

[143] I can't pass by the opportunity to highlight this hand metaphor; a collection of cards being referred to by the human appendage we use to hold these cards. Elsewhere—Sam Gill, "Thumbelina's Severed Head," *Religion and Technology into the Future: From Adam to Tomorrow's Eve* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2018) 1-10—I have considered the importance of the evolutionary development of the human hand with its distinctive opposable thumb—even the existence of our thumbs—as fundamental to the evolution of upright posture and the large human brain that is capable of metaphor. This is an example of an impossible copresence; a hand is not a collection of playing cards, yet it is.

[144] This assessment is based on US enrollment data. I do not have European statistics. According to Josh Patterson and Rob Townsend, "A Deeper Look at Trends in Undergraduate and Graduate Enrollments and Degree Completions," *Religious Studies News* (an AAR publication), January 27, 2021, there was a 31% decline of undergraduate religion degrees from 2013 to 2017, the latest years for which there are data, amounted to "the largest decline in 28 years of available data for the discipline, and brought the number of conferred degrees down to levels last seen in the late 1990s." https://rsn.aarweb.org/trends-religion-enrollments-and-degree-completions (consulted 3-12-2021). It is difficult to assess the recent level of interest in the study of religion given the impact of the covid pandemic on higher education across the globe 2020-2022.

[145] Abundant evidence is the experience I share with many longtime readers of Smith. Each reading reveals new and unexpected insights and inspirations seemingly overlooked on earlier readings. Of course, this is but evidence of contemporary literary theory.

potential of Smith's program and also how might we keep Smith in play and continue his work far beyond the explicit confines of his own specific cultural, historical, phenomenological, and theoretical studies?" As rapper Lloyd Banks put it, "Down,/The paint is peelin'/Now,/When the chips are down/Down,/You gotta lose all feelin'/Now,/Your head goes round n' round."[146] The insight of "chips"? Commitment and tension.

Proper Academic Study of Religion

The academic study of religion to be properly located in a secular academic context must identify the relevant data, yet Smith reminded as often noted, that there is no ontologically distinctive data of religion. It is then the academic, as also often the folk, understanding that circumscribes, if with fluidity and contention, the subject data of religion. Religion, a word indicating a category designation, is, Smith held, the invention of the scholar,[147] although, particularly in the contemporary period I'd also suggest a common folk category. The various data sets are commonly designated as religions (plural).[148]

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[146] This is the chorus of the 2016 rap song by Lloyd Banks "When the Chips are Down." I have to grin when I think how Smith would likely have responded—a cloud of blue language no doubt—to my inclusion of rap lyrics.

[147] Smith saw religion as the scholar's invention. Yet, in the contemporary period the term is widely used outside academia to refer to something that appears commonly in most cultures; thus, surely some broad forces that correspond perhaps with the awareness of global others have given rise to the term; probably most often as an English language word. It would be fascinating to comprehend the extent to which academic students of religion have influenced the folk understanding of religion; I suspect the direct influence has been minor. Even given the accuracy of Smith's proclamation, I think that a patternist and romantic understanding is prevalent among both scholars and folk; and that is why I believe that Eliade, or at least the academic theology he developed, remains the stronger influence not only among folk, but also scholars, if for them tacitly so.

[148] The appreciation of the possible range of what we often consider to be strange, weird, and horrible as religious, somewhere sometime, sheds light on the overly limiting view so common among scholars as well as folk that "religion is good" and all the synonymous associations.

To be properly academic in these terms, the category labeled religion must embrace data across history inclusive of all cultures. This global field does not technically require that something religious be found among them all, but it does mean that a culture in which something religious does not appear to exist is in itself of interest. The study of religion must be based on the comparative analysis of all these data that we might arrive at tentative distinctive traits. The comparisons made in the distinction of the genus at the core of the field must not privilege any set of data, especially on the grounds of religious beliefs (the foundational perspectives of one particular cultural and historical tradition).[149] In a proper academic study there can be no ontologized sacred, no divine agency, no dramatic breakthrough events (whether primordial[150] or personal), no romanticism, no mysticism, and no otherworldly symbolism;[151] other than, of course, as these distinctions might be used by our subjects as ways to characterize the data we choose to designate as religious. Religion, as a proper academic study, is a face of human ingenuity grounded in the commonness shared among human beings as situated in cultural, historical, social, psycho-logical, and biological frames. Building on Smith I have developed a per-

Such a view clearly has specific religious, cultural, and historical precessions.

[149] I've been fascinated by Milan Kundera's observation that religions are not so good with jokes. See his "The Day Panurge No Longer Makes People Laugh," in Kundera, *Testaments Betrayed: An Essay in Nine Parts* (New York: HarperCollins, 1993) 1-34. It is fascinating that while religions are inseparable from the grandest of impossibles—gods and myths and so on—the undeniable character of metastability—the holding together of two things as equal or actual that cannot be—is most commonly explained away with theological argument or hidden by a conspiracy of silence. Rarely are religions inclusive of joke and humor.

[150] One thinks of Eliade's *hierophanies*.

[151] This list is based on Burton Mack's reaction to his first encounter with Smith. See Burton Mack, "Sacred Persistence" in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, *Introducing Religion: Essays in Honor of Jonathan Z. Smith* (London: Equinox Publishing, Ltd., 2008) 299. [article is 296-310].

spective I refer to as an *aesthetic of impossibles*[152] I consider distinctive to being human. It indicates the capacity to *hold together two or more things, considering them the same even identical, knowing full well they are not the same at all.* This perspective is, I argue, particularly insightful and useful for the proper study of religion.

Perhaps these prerequisites are clear, obvious, and fairly uncontested; well, perhaps not all of them. Yet surely the questions they raise are important. We encounter classic academic concerns even in initiating the necessary comparisons that give specificity to the term "religion" as genus, as a broad category. When we can't know everything, how can we do or say anything? Or how can we keep global (generic) concerns active as we work on local ones (species)? In comparing, how do we avoid the overwhelm of our own received, and often tacit, world sense? Or how do we keep our own religious perspectives (so often tucked unnoticed among our naturalized gestures) from determining our outcomes? Quoting Wittgenstein, Smith put it this way, "And how am I to apply what the one thing shows me to the case of two things?"[153] How might our work be fueled by passion and conviction, as it must be, without being but a reflection of our desire, our theology even? In the broadest sense, how do we find the sameness among the difference, the difference among the same, without demolishing or trivializing either? These are the fundamental concerns of any human and humane study, are they not? Chiasms all. In his studies of comparison, mapping, difference, gaps, incongruities, anomal-

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[152] I have begun a series of self-published "art books" focused on an innovative format including my own photography that explores various areas of this Aesthetic of Impossibles. *On Photography* (2021) is volume 1. *On Moving: A Biological and Philosophical Account of Being Human* (2022) is volume 2.

[153] Smith "In Comparison a Magic Dwells," 40 as reprinted in in Kimberley Patton and Benjamin Ray (eds.), *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000); originally published in Smith, *Imagining Religions: From Babylon to Jonestown* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982).

ies, and theory we find Smith constantly raising and considering these fundamental concerns.[154]

I intend to outline a broad dynamic that is present across Smith's work that helps us appreciate how, building on his legacy,[155] we might embrace these questions and concerns to the advancement of our studies. I'll refer to this dynamic by the term *aesthetic of impossibles*, although I have also discussed it in other terms such as play[156] and comparison,[157] and the "necessary double-face."[158] I'll look to Smith's frequent use of jest and riddle for initial insights.

Jokes and Riddles

Smith often used riddles and jokes in titles and in the stylistics of his work.[159] His Yale doctoral dissertation (1969) was titled *The Glory, Jest, and Riddle: James George Frazer and The Golden Bough*. He never published this work even though I believe that it foreshadows Smith's entire life's work. He published only one

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[154] Yet, it must be noted that these fundamental concerns are not generally recognized by the current strategy of the field. As Smith noted—as did Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.) *Reading J. Z. Smith: Interviews and Essay* (New York: Oxford University Press. 2018) 126, n. 24—the current tenor of the field seems focused on area studies without showing much interest in the broader issue of religion. Smith expressed his concern, "We seem still committed to the priority of species over genera, apparently confident that a focus on the former is the route to a responsible consideration of the latter without, however, much reflection on how one sort of expertise might, in fact, lead to the other." Braun and McCutcheon, *Reading*, 126.

[155] An effort to begin this work is my *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020).

[156] Sam Gill, "No Place to Stand: Jonathan Z. Smith as *homo ludens*, the Academic Study of Religion *sub specie ludi*," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 66, no. 2 (1998) 59-88.

[157] Sam Gill, "The Necessary Double-Face: Jonathan Z. Smith and Comparison" in Gill, *The Proper Study of Religion*.

[158]Sam Gill, "Jonathan Smith and the Necessary Double-Face" in Emily D. Crews and Russell T. McCutcheon (eds.), *Remembering J. Z. Smith: A Career and its Consequences* (Sheffield, UK: Equinox Publishers, 2020), 100-108. In French « Jonathan Z. Smith, ou la duplicité nécessaire » *Asdiwal* 13 (2018): 53-60.

[159] Including his teaching, lecturing, and writing.

article on his Frazer work in 1973 titled "When the Bough Breaks".[160] The title is taken from the darkest most controversial line in a centuries old "Rock a Bye Baby" lullaby, "And when the bough breaks the baby will fall and down will come baby, cradle, and all."[161] He connects this seemingly tragic baby-endangering broken bough with Frazer's *Golden Bough*, a work of three editions whose research and writing spanned more than twenty-five years, the last edition comprised of a dozen volumes including five thousand sources from which he selected one hundred thousand culturally identified examples. Frazer's title suggests the massive work sought to resolve the question of why "had the priest of Nemi (Aricia) to slay his predecessor? And why, before doing so, had he to pluck the Golden Bough?"[162] Smith spent six years studying Frazer to conclude with the seemingly cruel joke that, as he wrote in a concluding sentence of his one article, "The *Bough* has been broken and all that it cradled has fallen. It has been broken not only by subsequent scholars, but also by the deliberate action of its author."[163] Huh? And in an Afterword added to the 1978 republication of the essay, Smith compounds the riddle writing "I would not wish 'When the Bough Breaks' to be misunderstood. Frazer, for me, becomes the more interesting and valuable precisely because he deliberately fails."[164] Deliberate failure of twenty-five years work? A failure that deserved six years of Smith's attention.

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[160] Jonathan Smith, "When the Bough Breaks," *History of Religions* 12 (1973): 342-71 reprinted with Afterword in Smith, *Map is Not Territory* (Leiden: Brill, 1978). He had originally planned to publish two articles.
[161] I explore this title and the essay in considerable depth in "The Necessary Double-Face: Jonathan Z. Smith and Comparison" in Gill, *The Proper Study of Religion*.
[162] Smith, "Bough," 208-12.
[163] Smith, "Bough," 1978, 239.
[164] Smith, "Bough," 1978, 239. And should one read Smith's dissertation one would discover that after spending hundreds of pages documenting Frazer's failure, Smith concluded with a final section titled "Frazer Redivivus?" that resurrects and rehabilitates Frazer, yet with the jesting inclusion of a question mark in the section title.

I could offer other examples of joke, jest, and riddle titles, such as "The Bare Facts of Ritual,"[165] with its clever homophone, or "I am a Parrot (Red)," with its colorful pun, and others; yet I'll consider only one other, his 2010 unpublished lecture titled "'Now You See It, Now You Won't': Religious Studies Over the Next Forty Years."[166] This title is of interest especially because, not only is it an expansive accounting of the study of religion, following "chips" it is also based on a gaming reference, the shell game, or rather scam, sometimes known as "three cup (or card) monte."[167] A pea is placed under one of three half shells and after moving them around in patterns the game master shows that the pea remains under the shell where we saw it put, "Now you see it!" But then after further moving the shells around the player is asked, with his/her bet down, to indicate which shell covers the pea. Invariably the player gets it wrong, "Now you won't!"[168] Smith's lecture reviewed the past study of religion and looked to its future, yet he did not explain

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[165] "The Bare Facts of Ritual" *History of Religions* 20 (1980): 112-37; reprinted in *Imagining Religion* (1982): 53-65 reveals Smith's use of the necessary double-face that I've suggested is the energizing dynamic of comparison and the academic enterprise in its play on the homophone terms "bear" and "bare." In Smith's discussion of a specific cultural practice (Ainu bear hunting), he sets forth the articulation of the basic (bare) or stripped-down (fundamental) features of his ritual theory and, in the process, also reflects on what we understand as "fact." Smith's title cleverly illustrates that what sounds identical isn't identical at all, yet it is in the identity of things not identical that is a foundational feature of ritual itself. The style of Smith's title reflects and enacts his ritual theory.

[166] The Cox Family Lecture at the University of Colorado, Boulder, delivered April 10, 2010.

[167] Smith told me that, as a kid, he often watched this game played in the parks in New York City.

[168] I find of interest Smith's choice of the word "won't" rather than "don't". "Won't" seems more definitive to me than "don't" indicating that this game is "fixed" to assure that the player loses. Indeed, the game is a scam. This word choice too is a jest of sorts. Does it not suggest that Jonathan is assured that we students of religion are destined to fail? Perhaps that we are engaged in a scam? But then we don't know quite what role the study of religion plays in this analogy. The effect is to stimulate discussion of fundamentals.

the riddle or his use of it. As usual, he leaves it, as also the future of the study of religion, to us, to provoke us. Is the future of the study of religion and its emerging scholars, the pea, the game master (*magister ludi*), the obscuring shells, or the player? Is the future study of religion, as related to the past, a game of deception? a sleight-of-hand illusion? or, something we will most always fail to successfully locate? In considering Smith's title, it is difficult to avoid some sense of anxious tension related to the current unfolding of the field of study. It seems unavoidable that Smith might well have been suggesting that after all our moving things around all these years, we've lost the object, religion, we thought we were tracking.

Given that Smith loved jokes, riddles, and laughter, it is appropriate to ask the broader question "what constitutes the structurality of joke, jest, and riddle"? How do the accompanying energetics function in Smith's work beyond enhancing the readability and engagement value of his style of writing?[169] Is it possible that these tropes function as densely compacted nuggets exemplifying his most fundamental theories and program requirements? My objective is to show that, to their glory, they decidedly do.

The distinctions of these tropes were articulated in my *Proper Study of Religion*.

> Jest or joke and riddle are forms that juxtapose unusual or even impossible items not with the intention of resolution, but rather for the appreciation of the effects and energetics created by such juxtapositions. We smile or laugh at a joke. Attempts at explaining jokes are inappropriate or in bad taste or they simply ruin the joke. Riddle varies from puzzle or problem in that the solution of the riddle does not release us from the riddle; rather it gives us pause to appreciate the double-sense of the thing. Often, through misdirection, a riddle conjoins what "is"

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[169] It came as some surprise to me at a session honoring Jonathan at the 2018 AAR national meetings to hear quite a few scholars express their considerable dislike of Smith's writing style. Several indicated that it irritated them that he seemed so often to contradict himself. I have always thought these seeming contradictions to be intentional, as constituting jest and riddle. Perhaps scholars, like their religious subjects, have an uncomfortable relationship with humor.

with what "cannot be" and "getting it" allows us to marvel at the cleverness of impossibles as well as perhaps our own remarkable ability to appreciate and engage such cleverness.[170]

The structural dynamics of riddle and jest and joke comprise an oscillatory, open, and ongoing energetics. They produce an "aha!" that keeps on giving. The juxtaposition of impossible frames occurs when engaging a relational mapping, a vitalizing comparison, a common metaphor,[171] an exploratory movement. Since the conjoined frames are impossibles, then there can be no resolution in that any proposed explanation opens further opposition. When the chips are down all is anticipation, the felt presence of only partially known implications of a future which is not now, an anticipated with unknown outcome.[172]

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[170] *Proper*, 73. Much of my own academic work over the last several decades has focused on foregrounding this distinctive human faculty identified by various terms such as play, aesthetic of impossibles, copresence, chiasm, and so on. I think my interest derives largely from my experience of human self-moving and dancing, yet its relevance to the academy and the study of religion owes much to my half century reading and reflecting on Smith and his work. I develop a theory of religion based on human self-moving in *The Proper Study of Religion*.

[171] Metaphor structurality is to say something *is* what we know it *is not*. As George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) and *Metaphors: A Practical Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2nd ed. 2010) and others have shown, metaphor underlies the power of language and it's structurality is metastability: holding as the same what we clearly know are not.

[172] There is a subjective aspect of jokes and riddles. They produce feelings as much as reasoned halts. Some who encounter jest, joke, and riddle relish and delight in them, others find them tedious, nonsensical, annoying, boring, or just plain useless. I've been fascinated that some tend to criticize Smith's style of writing because of what seems to them his penchant for contradicting himself. I suspect that these are the readers that find jests, jokes, and riddles something of a waste or merely stylistic. Jokes and riddles don't translate to other languages easily. Clearly teaching and reading Smith in non-English language settings offers a compounded challenge, since, as I'm arguing, these tropes are not limited to style, they are illustrations of substance.

Aesthetic of Impossibles

Religions as commonly identified are invariably characterized by the positing as true beyond question events and actions that, to any commonsense outsider, seem incredulous. Impossible. Myths are stories of characters and events in fantasy landscapes occurring at a time, outside of time itself as we know it. The actions recounted in myths are presented as originary, not simply to humankind and the practices and behaviors and laws adherents must follow, but to existence writ large. Cosmogonic. The actors in myths, as also often in scripture, are of other realms with powers beyond any known to the human world. The rituals so closely aligned with religions are symbol-laden costumed dramatic staged affairs conjoined with promised outcomes that, as a distinction, stretch credulity. Religions are often considered synonymous with *faith* and *belief*, the very words associated with likely challenges to their truth. Holders of faith and belief anticipate tests to their convictions against such confrontations.

Practicing our liberal ideals, as religion scholars we usually politely avoid any expression of the obviousness that religions are remarkably fascinating human behaviors precisely because they seem constantly to engage in impossibles, holding as true and real beyond question what in our common sense we know to be impossibly so. Smith however identified this quality as being what delighted and attracted him to the study of religion. His interests piqued by what made him laugh out loud was how he put it.[173] This criterion is consistent with Smith's delight in employing jokes, jests, and riddles in his research and writing and to his foregrounding religion as a species of play. His work is aptly characterized as the exploration of incongruity, difference, gaps, chaos, and incredulity which he saw essential to understanding the creative power so distinctive to what we commonly recognize as religions.[174]

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[173] Braun and McCutcheon, *Reading J.Z. Smith*, 49-50. Smith's focus on surprise, a term that is more fully discussed by Charles Sanders Peirce. See my "To Risk Meaning Nothing: Charles Sanders Peirce and the Logic of Discovery," in my *Creative Encounters*, 197-226.

[174] And now as I look back over a half century career of studying religion, I realize that I have been drawn to the study almost exclusively

It must be made clear that to find something outlandish, laughable, humorous, playful does not denote it as false. Of course, we do not laugh *at* our religious subjects for believing in the obviously false, a most questionable notion. Indeed, the delight I share with Smith, if I understand him, is that the generative creative power of religion is precisely its engagement of such imaginative constructions as the means to explore and express what is most foundational, most true. The strategy is akin to that of story and art; indeed, the religious imagination is often recognized as also of these genres. A significant ongoing discussion in the study of religion, especially relevant to those who spend time personally among their subjects, is how our admiration and delight in the impossibles of their religion, as fundamental to a secular study of the creative capacities of being human, should or ought to be discussed with those we study.

Impossible copresents, while being a forte of religions, are not limited to religions. Grounding Smith's insight in biology, which he did not, I believe an aesthetic of impossibles is a central distinction that appeared in the evolution of humans in conjunction with upright posture and opposing thumbs and large brains. Metaphor, for example, which is at the core of natural language is a trope distinguished by understanding one thing by equating it with something that we know full well it is not. Many things distinctively human—art, symbol, language—are based on the human capacity, which I believe is biologically[175] based as the gift of the long saga of evolution, to hold together without resolution two things declaring them to be the same, even identical, while knowing full well they are not. I call this capacity *aesthetic of impossibles.* How remarkable it is that the thumb-enabled capacity to *grasp* an object, like a hand of cards in a poker game, eventually becomes the word that means "to

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by how what we so commonly identify as religion is characterized by this aesthetic of impossibles. I certainly have had no interest in discovering personal wisdom or gaining salvation. What has interested me is the silliness of something so contrary to common sense and simple reason that is so nearly universally put forward as originary and ontologically fundamental.

[175] See for example, J. A. Jack Kelso, *Dynamic Patterns: The Self-Organization of Brain and Behavior* (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 1995). There are many others.

comprehend, to know." Just contemplate the immense bodily experiential history in which such an identity evolved. Just consider how natural it is for us to say that we "grasp a concept or idea" when we know full well that our thumbs are not needed; yet the concept, seemingly so abstract, is wholly dependent on thumbs.[176]

In the dynamic construct I refer to as *aesthetic of impossibles*, the "impossibles" refers to the incongruous, incoherent, incredulous that are presented as congruous, coherent, credible. I choose the term "aesthetic" because its Greek root *aisthetikos* means "to perceive by the senses, to feel." This word locates the dynamic I'm interested in, not in some purely mental or abstract realm, but firmly in biology and experience. The root sense of aesthetic is "I feel, I sense, I perceive, I know." It is a dynamic important to engaging human distinctiveness. It also directs our attention to the biological and philosophical insights on the construction and perception valued in terms of a continuum from incoherence to coherence. It directs us to the nexus of gesture, posture, and prosthesis—the bodied base, the patterned moving, and the encounter with environment—that may shape methods of academic research.

Aesthetic of impossibles generalizes and extends Smith's persistent interest in the importance of incongruity. While Smith often intimated this dynamic in terms of play as I have noted,[177]

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[176] For a fuller discussion of thumbs, see Chapter One "Thumbelina's Severed Head" in my *Religion and Technology*. And, of interest, to refer to a group of cards as a hand is also dependent on the thumb which enables our hands to hold a group of cards. We may easily make the connection between the group of cards and the word hand, yet we routinely do not think of the thumbed hand as fundamental to our reference to a group of cards as a hand.

[177] I've often written about play as I find it most importantly and profoundly described by Friedrich Schiller in his collection of letters titled *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795). His sense of aesthetics is developed in his recognition of the complementary yet opposing drives toward pure sensory experience/feeling and pure abstract form. He argues that these are impossible copresents; they are paired yet they are always in tension. As one becomes more dominant the other exerts more force. The oscillatory relationship between them gives rise to play and thus to beauty. Schiller's book likely contributed to the increased identification of the word aesthetic with beauty.

this aesthetic is my effort to broaden the scope and more formally develop the terms of the dynamic. It is particularly relevant to the proper study of religion in being biologically and philosophically based in human distinctiveness while broadly relevant to what we commonly identify as religions distinguished by their forte to deal creatively and imaginatively in impossibles.

This articulation of a proper study of religion shifts from halting often forced conclusions, tentative commitments to a place on which to stand, and strained statements of meaning to the articulation of dynamic processes, the interplay of energetics, the ongoingness of movings and practices and lifeways.

Comparison

Smith identified comparison as among his short list of "persistent preoccupations". While he wrote of comparison often throughout his career, I do not believe that the range of ways in which he understood comparison has yet been adequately appreciated.[178] While he used it as a banal workhorse academic method that produced definitive results,[179] he also discussed comparison in much broader philosophical terms as fundamental to the distinctively human processes of inquiry. I feel it likely that Smith's writings on comparison are too often considered to be only historical and methodological, not recognizing their powerful philosophical contributions.[180]

Perhaps due to the storied history of the grand program of "comparative religions" that promoted religious prejudice and practiced bad scholarship, many scholars today consider compareson tainted and wonder if there is any legitimate use of the method.[181] Comparison, as Smith often pointed out, is insepar-

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[178] For a full discussion of Smith's writings on comparison see my "The Necessary Double-Face: Jonathan Z. Smith and Comparison," *The Proper Study of Religion.*

[179] This understanding and use of comparison is particularly evident in Smith's critical study of Frazer where he sometimes even tabulated Frazer's accuracy in statistical terms.

[180] Smith's persistent criticism of comparison, particularly in the works of Frazer and Eliade, unfortunately and undeservedly contribute to this ambivalence regarding comparison.

[181] A noted exception is Bruce Lincoln, *Apples and Oranges: Explorations in, on, and with Comparison* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018)

able from fundamental intellectual processes. We cannot articulate classification, typology, or definition without employing comparison. Even the biological processes of perception, involving identification, requires the comparative operations of pattern recognition. While academic methods must carefully articulate the terms and operations of explicit comparison as academic method, it is not something that any academic action can avoid since it characterizes the milieu in which we exist.

Smith gave expression to his sense of the importance of comparison to a proper academic study of religion in the closing paragraphs of his chapter "On Comparison" in *Drudgery Divine*.

> Comparison, as seen from such a view, is an active, at times even a playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstitution which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary. The comparative enterprise provides a set of perspectives which "serve different analytic purposes by emphasizing varied aspects" of the object of study.[182]

> It is the scholar's intellectual purpose—whether explanatory or interpretative, whether generic or specific—which highlights that principled postulation of similarity which is the ground of the methodical comparison of difference being interesting. Lacking a clear articulation of purpose, one may derive arresting anecdotal juxtapositions or self-serving differentiations, but the disciplined constructive work of the academy will not have been advanced, nor will the study of religion have come of age.[183]

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who tells a rather edgy story of being discouraged by Smith from pursuing his interest in the grand comparative enterprise, turning to Eliade as a more compatible mentor.

[182] His quotation in this paragraph is from F. J. P. Poole, "Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 54 (1986): 411-457.

[183] Jonathan Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 53.

Comparison practices the aesthetic of impossibles in being powered by the distinctly human capacity to hold that one thing is another in some respect, yet what is important is that the one thing isn't the other and we know it all along. Particularly in the form I've articulated as *subjective heuristic*[184] comparison, involves the basic academic processes including those that give rise to hypothetic inference.[185] It is essential to all advancement of knowledge. Comparison, in this sense, has the structurality of vitality itself. This form of comparison, as Smith discussed it, is the magic[186] of the aesthetic of impossibles that fuels the kind of passion that must energize an entire field of study.

Mapping

Smith articulated his fundamental differences from Eliade on their understandings of religion and the study of religion most

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[184] In my paper building on Smith, "'What the One Thing Shows Me in the Case of Two Things': Comparison as Essential to a Proper Academic Study of Religion," *Method and Theory in the Study of Religion*, 21: 1-19, I propose two forms of comparison I refer to as *objective limited comparison* and *subjective heuristic comparison*. The objective is the rather mundane and mechanical method that juxtaposes two things largely to discern difference, as in comparing a text to its cited source. Subjective heuristic comparison identifies the sorts of juxtapositions that result in surprise and is an important, even essential part of the logic of creativity and discovery.

[185] See my "Religion by Abduction" in *Native American Religious Action: A Performance Approach to Religion* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), 3-16 and my Chapter 14 "To Risk Meaning Nothing: Charles Sanders Peirce & the Logic of Discovery" *Creative Encounters* (2019).

[186] I use the term magic here in an admittedly romantic, perhaps literary, sense, yet to also recall another riddling title used by Jonathan "In Comparison a Magic Dwells" (1982) and the collection of essays examining Smith's comparison studies edited by Kimberley Patton and Benjamin Ray, *A Magic Still Dwells* (2000). It is fascinating that Smith, though according to Professor Patton was resistant, was persuaded to write a short piece for this volume with the title "The 'End' of Comparison." By placing the word "end" in quotation marks he creates the riddle that is an excellent demonstration of the aesthetic of impossibles juxtaposing two contrasting meanings of the term end that parallel rather precisely two of the common uses of the "chips" term.

often in terms of the desired outcome of comparison. In simplest terms Eliade engaged comparison in grand patternist models that encompassed vast difference yet for the purpose of discovering, or inventing, sameness; a method designed to eliminate or diminish difference. For Eliade, difference is a product of appearance, the varying manifestation of common universal patterns, patterns that, as articulated by Eliade, amounted to something of an academic theology. Smith preferred the persistence of difference as being of greater interest and for the heuristic value of generating ongoing engagement both of the subject religions and also religion theory.[187] Not unlike Frazer, Eliade gathered vast exempla sorted into categories primarily for the reductive effort to eliminate the differences by uncovering, or concocting, the common patterns and principles.

Smith often addressed these comparative operations in terms of mapping strategies although he tended to simply call them maps. While an adequate discussion of Smith's writings on maps requires fuller attention, here I'll summarize.[188] Smith proposed that the study of religion, but also religions themselves as he hypothesized, might be understood in terms of maps. Such an approach is part of the pervasive focus on *place* in the articulation of religion theory.[189] Among his most influential essays, initially the classic 1974 lecture "Map is Not Territory,"[190] Smith propos-

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[187] I have developed this notion more fully in the terms of "creative encounter"; see Gill, *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference.*

[188] I have engaged Smith's complex and profound writings on mapping in several places, most recently in the context of exploring how he understood experience. See my "The Ordeal of Incongruity: Jonathan Smith and Experience" in *The Proper Study of Religion*.

[189] I have often critically discussed this tendency to focus on place as a fundamental strategy for articulating religion theory. See Chapter Six "Dancing" in my *Dancing Culture Religion* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012). In my recent work focusing on the importance of moving, process, dynamics, I recognize that place is inherently halting, that is, it stops the process of inquiry and for anything worth our time for serious academic inquiry it is the ongoingness, the opening, that engages our interest more so than the hope or expectation of finality.

[190] This lecture was first published in Smith's *Map is Not Territory: Studies in the History of Religions* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1978): 289-309.

ed two common maps of the cosmos, the *locative* that sought to have everything in its place, and the *utopian* that seemed to have rebellious disdain for the seeming confinement of maps. What has been so commonly overlooked by scholars who follow Smith in this strategy is that he dismissed both maps as each the flipside of the other and both effecting a halt to the ongoing experience of what Smith commonly termed "application." He continued by describing an unnamed third strategy, unnoticed by most,[191] that should be familiar to my emphasis in this essay on joke and riddle. He wrote, "The dimensions of incongruity which I have been describing in this paper, appear to belong to yet another map of the cosmos. These traditions are more closely akin to the joke in that they neither deny nor flee from disjunction but allow the incongruous elements to stand. They suggest that symbolism, myth, ritual, repetition, transcendence are all incapable of overcoming disjunction. They seek, rather, to play between the incongruities and to provide an occasion for thought."[192] This is precisely the condition I have wanted to clarify, advance, and foreground in my discussions of an aesthetic of impossibles.

There are other important issues related to mapping that further demonstrate Smith's engagement in this fundamental energetics I'm referring to as an aesthetic of impossibles. Smith's title "Map is Not Territory" is the opening sally of a riddle that is finally won in the final sentence of this lecture, "'Map is not territory'—but maps are all we possess."[193] I've explored this riddle more fully elsewhere, yet summarizing, to say map is not territory is to say the obvious, yet to then add "but maps are all

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[191] Of the many references to Smith's discussion of maps I have read, the only scholars I know who have acknowledged the third map are Mary Dunn, "Playing with Religion: Delight at the Border between Epistemological Worlds," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, forthcoming, and Seth Schermerhorn, "Multiple Magdalenas: Locative, Utopian, and Other Orientations in an Indigenous Community Divided by an International Border," in *Thinking with J.Z. Smith*, ed. by Barbara Krakowicz, (NAASA Working Papers), Sheffield, UK: Equinox Press, 2023. Both cite me as drawing attention to this third map.

[192] Smith, "Map," 309.

[193] Smith, "Map," 309.

we possess" poses the riddle. What might be any use at all of a map without a territory? How can such a thing be even deserving of the term "map"? It is Smith's riddling way of invoking the ordeal, yet the potential, of the aesthetic of impossibles unavoidable by all academic studies. The academy is coincident with the second order. What we invariably study, what characterizes our raw materials as also our product, are maps not territories.

Yet we chip away at these maps in our workshops with the presumption, obviously impossible, that the print sources that comprise what we study are successful, even perfect, transductions of the sensory-rich realities of our subjects. Humming merrily along we scholars often fail to question the presumption we allow that these texts are one-to-one scaled maps[194] indistinguishable from the real territories of our fleshy subjects. Even as Smith opts for "reading" as the primary work of the scholar, his riddle forces the map-territory relationship to continue as an open concern, an ignored, yet uncomfortable, ordeal. Perhaps, to return to the riddle of an earlier title, Smith is suggesting that upon moving around the shells (presumed maps, print objects, of our subject territories) that seem the principal work of our game, should we ever tip up a half-shell there is no pea (real subject or territory) to be found, indeed, not under any of our clever shells.

While these issues of mapping were introduced among the earliest essays Smith wrote, I believe his discussions of map have richness yet to be explored.[195] I pose that this work is essential in that it engages the most important and fundamental concerns on which depends our future existence.

Moving

For the study of religion to have a rightful place in the secular university it must be grounded in the human enterprise, in the human arts and sciences, both social and natural. As I see it, the efforts to establish a proper academic study of religion have had

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[194] Impossible in itself as Lewis Carroll explored in a clever passage in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893) that humorously considers the consequences of a map with a scale of "a mile to a mile."

[195] My several recent publications on comparison are an effort to explore these implications and to initiate a much fuller and renewed discussion.

declining interest in the ongoing concerns Smith referred to as genera, that is, in the explicit efforts to invent and establish the general category religion and what constitutes its proper study.[196] The default position has become, to a significant extent, the atomization of the field into a collection of area studies (studies of species) loosely conjoined by a largely administrative rubric. In his 2010 lecture "Reading Religion: A Life in Learning," Smith expressed his concern about this tendency saying, "The groundwork, it seemed to me, *then* [1960s] was there laid for the development of a generic study of *religion*, but that expectation has largely remained unrealized. We seem still committed to the priority of species over genera, apparently confident that a focus on the former is the route to a responsible consideration of the latter without, however, much reflection on how one sort of expertise might, in fact, lead to the other."[197]

The academic study of religion in Europe predated, by a decade or more, the USA rapid growth in the 1960s, expanding from 25 to 173 departments in just half a dozen years.[198] Smith, whose career began in the 1960s, was one of a cohort of scholars[199] who, in these early years, offered regular and consistent attention to the foundational needs of the establishment of a proper study of religion in the context of the wide expansion of the field into secular universities. Throughout his career,

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[196] Likely there have been studies that document this trending and its underlying reasons. My hunch is that with the field emerging in the USA so rapidly in the 1960s the only practical way to populate the field with scholars was to draw disproportionately on seminary-educated scholars. These scholars then did what they had been trained to do even though located in a secular university. The demand for scholars likely accounts for my successful admission to the University of Chicago despite my having a BS in Mathematics and an MS in Business. It also accounts why the field at its beginning was dominated by Christian studies followed by other Abrahamic traditions.

[197] Braun and McCutcheon, *Reading* 2018: 126; italics in the original.

[198] Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 2004) 55.

[199] Even in Smith's cohort, most were known primarily by their area/religion identity. Among this group: Jacob Neusner, one of the most published authors in history, studied Judaism; Burton Mack studied Christianity; although Hans Penner was a student of comparative religion (Eliade's student) he focused on Buddhism.

Smith persistently contributed to the development of theories of religion, myth, ritual, to the development of techniques and methods, most importantly comparison with ontological as well as methodological aspects. Given what Smith did to establish an important foundation, I believe much remains to do to establish adequate bases for a proper religion study.[200] In this paper I have suggested, in a far too cursory way, that threading throughout Smith's many theories and perspectives is a strategy and structureality I've termed an *aesthetic of impossibles* that is based in an important evolved human distinctiveness. What remains is to demonstrate more fully how this aesthetic is firmly grounded in the human arts and sciences, that is, how it grounds the study of religion properly as foremost a human enterprise. I will show that this aesthetic is consistent with and possible due to the distinctive nature of human self-moving.

For decades I have been increasingly fascinated by certain aspects of human biology, not in a reductionist sense of under-standing religion in terms of metabolism (Hans Jonas[201]) or caloric and protein needs (Marvin Harris) or some equivalent to a neurological "god spot" (Cognitive Study of Religion[202]), but rather by the evolved remarkable human capacity to transcend ourselves through gesture, language, imagination, perception, and conception; we might call it the *human biology of transcendence.*

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[200] I am not claiming that there are no scholars currently interested in and contributing importantly to this concern. Rather it seems to me scholars with strong concerns for the genera, religion, are few. Even the persistent academic interest in Smith and his work has seemed to me to be rather small. While many current religion scholars know of Smith, his outsized personality and eccentric appearance drew much greater attention than his scholarship.

[201] Hans Jonas, *The Phenomenon of life: Toward a Philosophical Biology* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966; reprint, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1982), IX. This perspective was carefully and critically reviewed in Renaud Barbaras, "Life and Perceptual Intentionality," *Research in Phenomenology*, 33 (2003), 157-66.

[202] I don't intend this concern to either exhaust or represent the approach or achievements of the CSR. In my reading of this area of study I have often felt a style of reductionism and a foregrounding of statistics that seem to me limit the importance of their conclusions. I acknowledge a bit of personal peeve due to finding so many of the exemplary studies off putting.

The specific terms of this biology have evolved for me over the last several decades coincident with my study of and participation in dancing. They have been birthed through the accumulated experience in my personal and intellectual history. Certainly, these ideas are based in the just-so certainty of my own experience, yet as an academic I've worked to understand and articulate them in terms of biology[203] and philosophy[204] focusing principally on dancing and, more broadly, on human self-moving.[205] Biologically, proprioception and kinesthesia (and more broadly the senses) are remarkable in creating a sensory

[203] Although the development of the remarkable insights of the biology of self-moving is beyond the scope of this paper, I must at least mention some of the resources I find most important. The classic work of Russian physiologist, Nikolai Bernstein's *The Coordination and Regulation of Movement* (New York: Pergamon Press, 1967) remains important. For a more recent work that incorporates considerable neuroscience see Alain Berthoz, *The Brain's Sense of Movement* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[204] Among the most important works on the philosophy of movement are Renaud Barbaras, *Desire and Distance: Introduction to the Phenomenology of Perception* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006; Fr. Ed. 1999), Michel Serres, *Variations on the Body* (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2011; Fr. Ed. 1999), Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002) and Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 1999; 2nd ed. 2011).

[205] Although it may initially seem a trifle distinction, I attempt to avoid identifying the terms movement and self-moving. The distinction deserves an extensive discussion, yet, here, I simply note that self-moving refers to the movement actively biologically initiated and effected by an animate organism, whether conscious or not. Self-moving is biologically active. Movement might include the objectification of an event involving moving or the bodily passive movement of being conveyed in a vehicle. Maurice Merleau-Ponty discusses the significance of self-moving in his essay "Eye and Mind" *The Primacy of Perception* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1964) 159-190. Edmund Husserl referred to self-moving as "kinesthetic movement" indicating the importance of the felt quality of moving oneself. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone noted, upon discussion of Husserl and others, that a phenomenological understanding of self-moving is incomplete, *Inside and Outside: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Animate Nature* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2016), 4.

awareness of moving as well as the near identity of moving and touching in the biological processes of perception and knowing. The human biology of moving has evolved to allow objectify-cation of and reflection on both self and other. Philosophically the identity of self-moving with life itself and feelings of vitality, the corporeal base of conception, and the movement base of perception are convincing and powerful. I have found a clear and strong compatibility between these biological and philo-sophical insights.[206] Indeed, the very existence of biology and philosophy make the point. As living beings, we move and we feel ourselves moving; furthermore, we can represent and reflect on this awareness to comprehend our moving both biologically and philosophically.

Self-moving, my own dancing, would seem to be my greatest contrast with Smith who described his own self-moving life as limited largely to his walking to the library or to his book-shelves.[207] Yet it is my contention that the aesthetic of impos-sibles that I believe is at the core of Smith's creative insights, as I have outlined, is biologically and philosophically grounded in the experience of human self-moving.

Maxine Sheets-Johnstone and Renaud Barbaras have shown in extensive far-reaching discussions that for animate organisms life is synonymous with self-moving; that is what the term[208] in its redundancy emphasizes. We come to life as movers. While throughout life we acquire a plethora of kinds of moving, we do not at birth need learn to move. Self-moving cannot be acquired other than through living moving. These philosophers, along with Michel Serres and Brian Massumi, show that perceptual awareness and reflectiveness and conception are impossible

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[206] I have been surprised that these important areas of the study of moving, biology and philosophy, rarely indicate awareness of and influence on one another.

[207] In Braun and McCutcheon, *Reading J. Z.*, 121. This lecture is also available on YouTube: https://youtu.be/K8ZuJ3BdHFk (viewed 12/15/2018).

[208] The term "animate organism" was developed and used by Edmund Husserl.

apart from evolved capacities accompanying human self-moving.[209]

The experience of moving is the experience of process, the dynamic orientation related to both *here* and *there*; both are implicated, yet with the full presence of neither. We are never *in* any place when we move, as Brian Massumi pointed out,[210] otherwise we would not be moving. Self-moving gives the experience (kinesthesia) of the conjunction of here and there that might, in its halt, become map. Yet in the actual moving it is the experience of an aesthetic of impossibles, a feeling way of knowing the connection (impossible identity?) of *here* and *there* before there is any measurant; that is, self-moving is the biologically-based experience of vitality in its virtuality.[211] Certainly, we humans share self-moving with the large family of our animate organism kin, yet I hold that only humans have evolved the capacity for self-reflection, copresent with our felt awareness of our own moving, that allows us to acknowledge, articulate, and wonder at this most banal of our species' traits. This is the capacity to turn the experience of self-moving into movement, into the maps that chart the self-moving experience.

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[209] I'm well aware of the cursory character of this discussion of self-moving, limited here to be compatible with the structure of the essay. I have fuller discussions of moving in my *Dancing Culture Religion* (Lanham: Lexington Press, 2012), *Religion and Technology* (2018), *Creative Encounters* (2019), "Moving: The Core of Religion" *Body and Religion*, vol. 1.2, 2018 131–147, *The Proper Study of Religion (2020)* and *On Moving: A Biological and Philosophical Account of Human Distinctiveness* (2022, 2023).

[210] Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual*, 4. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone develops the implications of this distinction more extensively in *Inside and Outside*, 11-14.

[211] Virtuality refers to the identity of life with change. As Michel Serres wrote, "the whole of life, too, moves … life doesn't merely change place, it changes. ... Life doesn't merely move and change, it exchanges …. My body and our species don't exist so much in concrete reality as in 'potency' or virtuality." (*Variations on the Body*, 50-52). Virtuality refers to the moving, the ongoing dynamic, aspect of movement. The self-moving human body can be understood as *incorporeal corporeality* as Brian Massumi suggested (5) in his aptly titled, for this point, book *Parables for the Virtual.*

As Renaud Barbaras, developing especially on the work of Merleau-Ponty[212] and Jan Patočka,[213] has shown, self-moving[214] is self-transcending[215] in the constant and banal acts of perceiving and knowing.[216] From this biological capacity arises, I propose, religious notions of transcendence and our broad obsession with the horizon concepts of the other, the outer, the beginning and ending and also the constant concern with myth (and cosmogony), ritual, belief, faith, and the construction of impossible beings and timescapes and landscapes in a surfeit of shapes and sizes. As Charles Sanders Peirce argued over a century ago, once one has the capacity to conceive *outside*— Sheets-Johnstone[217] argues that it is perhaps our first corporeal concept and which I'm arguing is based in evolved human biology—then a half hour's musement (Peirce's phrase) quickly leads to the positing of some ultimate outside. It is the inevitable outcome of the just-so impossibility that some inside has no outside. And it is fascinating that this ultimate outside is as much

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[212] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968).

[213] See Barbaras, *Desire and Distance.*

[214] He termed it "living movement."

[215] The awareness of the virtuality of moving is an awareness beyond the mere physicality of biomechanics. Brian Massumi discusses what I have termed "incorporeal corporeality" and Sheets-Johnstone demonstrates the corporeality of concepts, that is, that concepts are at base dependent on Earth resident human distinctive biology. She argues that "in," and I'd pair that necessarily with "out," is likely our first concept, but early as well are the relational concepts in front/behind, above/below, before/after, and so on. The concept transcendence, rooted in Latin *scandere* meaning to climb, is based in corporeal actions that incorporate the corporeal orientational concepts up/down.

[216] See principally his *Desire and Distance,* also Barbaras, "Life and Exteriority," in *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science*, John Stewart, et al, eds. (2010), 105.

[217] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, "Thinking in Movement: Further Analyses and Validations," in John Stewart, et. al., *Enaction: Toward a New Paradigm for Cognitive Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010): 165-82.

an impossible for physicists[218] as it is for the clodhopper (also Peirce's term) or the theologian.[219] Another aspect of an aesthetic of impossibles is shared with moving. As process, the energetics of moving may be charted by the halting transduction of process into event, yet ongoingness is characterized by the presence of the unpredictable, the creative influence of accident, the presence of random influences. The word *nonlinearity* is a technical term that refers to the unpredictable, the unexpected, the surprises, the novelties, the randomness that occurs in any complex self-regulating network from the nervous system to the animate organism to societies including religions. Nonlinearity too is inspired by moving; since moving is not in any place, there is a necessary element of the unexpected and unpredictable in the very essence of moving; the tension of the unknown felt when "the chips are down." Nonlinearities are what laboratories seek to eliminate or isolate and what academic theories and definitions seek to normalize and reduce. Yet nonlinearity is an essential part of any system, and, in my view, it exists at the core of change and creativity, an essential for novelty as also vitality. History and biography and even scientific theory may articulate recognizable patterns, yet our interest in such accounts is always drawn to those occasions where nonlinearity becomes apparent and impactful. In religious contexts nonlinearity is essential to the excitement implied in such notions as free will, fate,

[218] The late physicist Stephen Hawking and others sometimes contemplated a grand theory of everything (GTE), a sort of complex mathematical formula that would calculate the condition of anything at any place and any time including the very invention of the GTE formula itself. Hawking saw this formulation as the end of science. Stephen Hawking, *A Brief History of Time* (New York: Bantam, [1988] 2011). And, of course, physicists' imagination of the Big Bang is a singularity which literally means it is a nonlinearity, the Big Nonlinearity. Most certainly both words, in what must be but metaphor, "big" and "bang" are corporeally based and relative. Big compared with what and by whom? There is nothing there. Who was there to hear the "bang"? If there is a bang in the "nothing", does it make a sound? Much fun at the expense of serious physicists.
[219] Charles Sanders Peirce, "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God," in *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, edited by C. Hartshorne and P, Weiss, Vol. VI (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1934).

destiny, evil, belief, miracle, and death. In a completely predictable world, a world absent nonlinearity, none of these terms would have any play at all.

Smith's delight in joke and jest and riddle and play and comparison and mapping and difference is his embrace of nonlinearity and metastability. "When the chips are down" is energized by the presence of chance, of the nonlinearity of the outcome. The nonlinearity of an aesthetic of impossibles is the perpetuation of the conditions at that moment of having just put one's chips down. Despite Smith's preference for "reading" and the armchair work that restricts his subject to the transduced phenomena of print—seemingly both his avoidance of, even disdain for, sensory rich experience (the actual territories) as well as self-movement—careful analysis[220] shows that the energetics of both experience and moving are fundamental to his program throughout his writing, evidence of the presence of both, if in unexpected ways.

Given his academic theology of religion, Mircea Eliade didn't care much for history because of its relativity and nonlinearity; that is, its humanity. His theory of religion was one that identifies the presence of nonlinearity—its relativity, its conflict and variance from the perfect world of godly creation—with humans and their penchant for the messy work of making, or perhaps accidenting, history.[221] Eliade's notion of religion seems the antidote to the nonlinearity inseparable from human beings moving themselves about, often unpredictably, all the time. Eliade seemed to allow creativity only if it is a replication of godly creation; and that seems to pretty much eliminate novelty and also much of what characterizes human beings! Eliade stood in a very long tradition of equating religion with perfection, or at the least with "the good." Religion is the special, the extraordinary. Our cultural and religious gestural naturalization of this perspective with its paired body of concepts, is, I believe, among our greatest obstacles to the development of a proper academic study of religion.

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[220] I have developed this analysis in my *The Proper Study of Religion* particularly the chapters on comparison and experience.

[221] The notion of human making, particularly as it relates to technology, is at the center of my *Religion and Technology* (2018).

Smith preferred the development of religion as a proper academic study. One that would situate religion in a world that includes, that is even characterized by, chaos and incongruity and difference and the potential for disorder. In its proper study, religion must be found in the most banal of human situations arising due to the unexpected, the unpredictable, the surprises that require the artful application of its guiding strategies often embedded gesturally in data we classify as rituals and stories. In the proper academic study of religions, as also the invented category itself, religion is characterized as moving dynamic series of change; as vitalizing processes and insights into life itself. Fundamental to the formalization of these moving processes, crucial to comprehending and appreciating the delightful impossibilities of both religion and its proper study, important to our invention of a strategy to engage at once both genera and species (religion and religions), is to build on Jonathan Smith by embracing and articulating the dynamics and details of an aesthetic of impossibles.

23

As Prayer Goes, So Goes Religion[222]

A blast of cold air from the gray snowy winter afternoon enters with the group of masked *diyin dine'e*[223] as they push past the blanket covering the east-facing door of the hogan. The heat quickly wins back the close space. Artisans have worked much of the day on ritual preparations especially the process of strewing colored sand layer by layer making a large sandpainting (*iikaah*). Filling much of the packed dirt floor it features depictions of the same *diyin dine'e* as those entering. Sitting in the middle of this complex design with her legs and bare feet stretched to the east is a middle-aged woman. Her graying hair hangs about her shoulders rather than being tied up in the chignon typical for Navajo women. She wears only the tiered skirt of traditional dress. The "singer" (*hatałii*) or medicine man has just stood up from his position sitting facing the woman; together they have finished reciting a long prayer. The frequent performances of prayer rituals are essential to this Navajo Holyway (*diyink'ehji*) healing ceremony that lasts nine nights and the intervening eight days.[224] The sandpainting rites including

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[222] In my *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference* (2019) 147-67.

[223] *Diyin dine'e* is a term commonly translated to English as "Holy People." Since there are many named figures of story and ritual this term serves as a generic for them. They are addressed in prayer and are characters in stories. I am not convinced that it is appropriate to simply identify these figures with such English terms as spirits or gods or deities. Such terms might have the effect of wrongfully skewing far from the way such figures are understood by Navajos. In the Holyway ceremony Nightway the *diyin dine'e* are a specific grouping known as *ye'ii* or *yeibichaii* referring to the grandfather *ye'ii*.

[224] For fuller analysis of Nightway sandpainting rituals, see Gill, "Whirling Logs and Coloured Sands." In *Native Religious Traditions*.

prayers are major rituals performed on each of the last four days. The *diyin dine'e* walk on the sandpainting where the one-sung-over (*bik'i nahagha*) or patient sits and in a ritualized sequence of body parts—feet, legs, body (torso), mind (head), voice (mouth)—they touch the figures of themselves appearing in the painting and transfer the sand adhering to their hands moistened with a medicine concoction to her corresponding body parts. Once this identification accomplished both in prayer and the ritual touching with the *diyin dine'e* is complete the one-sung-over is assisted off the sandpainting and the sands of the now much-blurred painting are scrapped together and transferred to a blanket to be, finally, taken out of the hogan and ritually deposited in an appropriate place.[225]

Navajo prayers (*sodizin*) are typically composed of modular patterns of familiar constituents with extensive and systematic repetition within the phrases making up each constituent,[226] whole sections or constituents, as well as entire prayers. Repetitions are marked by key word changes, each repetition corresponding with an item in a traditional sequence. For example, common sequences recite such lists as the proper order and divisions within the human body (as above), the distinctive features of Navajo country, and formulaic sequences that pervade Navajo tradition and story. Most Navajo prayers are recited in the context of complex healing rituals, yet almost every need and concern recognized by Navajos is traced in some way to issues of health. Health is fundamentally a matter of proper relationship among people and between people and elements in the environment and the *diyin dine'e*.

Prayer recitations are formal with the singer repeating a prayer phrase by phrase with but a brief gap following each

Edited by Earle Waugh and R. Prithipaul. Waterloo, Ontario, Canada: Wilfred Laurier Press, 1979, pp. 151-163. Revised in Gill, *Native American Traditions*, pp. 71-77.

[225] See Gill, "Whirling Logs" for both sandpainting and for Nightway.
[226] In an examination of over 20,000 prayer segments or lines (though this wrongfully suggests that Navajo prayer is written) I was able to identify 20 distinct constituents for the many hundreds of Navajo prayers that occur in the context of many different healing rituals and other rites. See Gill, *Sacred Words: A Study of Navajo Religion and Prayer* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981).

phrase. The one-sung-over repeats each phrase with the same timing. Since there is not quite adequate time in the singer's gap for the completion of the phrase by the one-sung-over the resulting sound of Navajo prayer is flowing and resonating. Praying requires vast memory by the singer and intense concentration by the one-sung-over necessary to hear and repeat a phrase while listening to the next one and so on and on often for extensive periods of time. Navajo prayer is almost always recited in the context of larger ritual processes and the structural composition of the prayer—the selection and organization of the various constituents (groupings of related and often repeating phrases)—corresponds not only with the patterns of ritual processes being performed but also with the vast body of Navajo mythology, song, and the causal factors attributed to the illness being treated.[227] Studies of the parallels among these various ritual constituents demonstrate that the repetition is not confined to the words of the prayer but is also replicated to resounding effect in song, mechanical ritual processes, and ritual materials, all invoking, but usually without reciting them, specific stories in the vast bodies of mythology commonly known to Navajos.

While it is rather evident that Navajo prayer is essential as a speech act to all Navajo ritual and that the rhythms and complex patternings of Navajo prayer correlate with the order of ritual, song, story, land, history, and origination, we non-Navajo academics nonetheless seem to want more in terms of a comprehension of Navajo prayer as we do also of other prayer traditions. Perhaps this is a desire born of the history of the study of religion that has so often simply ignored prayer despite its rather powerful and unavoidable identity with religion. For one thing, it seems we academics don't quite know what to do with repetition, with actions like applying sands to sick peoples' bodies, with rhythms of repetition in song and story and prayer,

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[227] Gill, *Sacred Words*. Based on the analysis of over 20,000 lines/phrases of recorded prayers in Navajo ethnography. See also Gill, "Prayer as Person: The Navajo Conception of Prayer Acts" *History of Religions* 17:2 (1977): 143-157 and "Prayer as Performance: A Navajo Contribution to the Study of Prayer" in *Native American Religious Action* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), pp. 89-112.

with manipulating material stuff[228] like sandpaintings, prayer-sticks, and the endless physical bits of ritual processes. We sometimes satisfy our felt obligation to do something with prayer acts by simply describing these things. A favored approach is to consider aspects of prayer/religion in terms of symbols which we try to correlate with meaning. Most usually we confine ourselves to the word aspects of these complexes because we best know how to approach the interpretation and explanation of words; and if we include the repetitions of words, we likely invoke poetry to provide understanding. Even repetition, we reason, becomes comprehensible only when rendered into an explanation of doctrine, belief, theology or at least poetry.[229]

While one can comprehend secular ritual, see it even as commonplace;[230] one can scarcely comprehend *secular prayer*. Prayer marks religion distinctively. Thus, to comprehend something of prayer is to comprehend something of the elusive distinctiveness of religion.[231] The promise and potential for our pursuit of the study of prayer must be: *as prayer goes so goes religion*. We can scarcely understand prayer without also revealing some important insights about religion. It is rather odd that within many of the literate based religious traditions that include prayer,

[228] See Manuel Vasquez, *More than Belief: A Materialist Theory of Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2010).

[229] As its title suggests, my *Sacred Words*, was an example of such an approach. However, taking something of a structuralist approach vogue at the time I attempted to demonstrate correlations among vast structures distinctive to Navajo culture as well as to at least intimate that the performance of all this was the most important.

[230] For example, *Secular Ritual* by Sally Falk Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Uitgeverij Van Gorcum, 1977).

[231] I commonly make the distinction between religion (singular) by which I indicate the scholar's invention of the human category (the notion is also present among folk in modern cultures) and religions (plural) by which I mean the practices, doings, and stuff found in cultures under various names yet somehow familiar to us as religious. I do not see these terms as but separate or unrelated or a duality, but rather an interacting relationality I tend to discuss in terms of copresence or play. If we use one term, we are always already implying the other. The same distinction should be made of prayer/prayers or better prayer/prayings.

the literature on prayer (what elsewhere I've called meta-prayer)[232] is typically extensive. These writings offer guides to praying, collections of prayers, occasions for praying, and discussions of outcomes. Yet, the academic study of religion has few efforts at a rich comparative study of prayer.[233] At best the study of religion usually remains satisfied with the descriptive account of a single tradition. Perhaps the reticence to the comparative study of prayer and the development of theories[234] of prayer is rooted in the early history of our study where distinctions were made in the stages of the evolution of religion; that is, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries when academic accounts were defended in terms of the old battles over magic and high gods.[235] The very repetitive and formulaic character of prayer was one of the primary markers of magic making prayer seem, uncomfortably to align with magic, rather than religion. Prayer has, until quite recently everywhere been the recitation of repeating formulas and it even continues to be so more than we might think; the number of repetitions is often high, and the formulaic content is mostly invariable. Such speech acts seem, god forbid, much more the marker of magic

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[232] Gill, "Prayer" *The Encyclopedia of Religion* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1987).

[233] One of the few is the old Frederick Heiler, *Prayer: A Study in the History and Psychology of Religion*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1932, orig. 1928).

[234] I increasingly prefer alternative terms like "accounts of religion" to suggest their openness to development and transformation, whereas "theory" suggests a hypothetic inference that is subject to testing and verification, a retrograde movement.

[235] E. B. Tylor's ten-page discussion of prayer in *Primitive Religion* (London, 1873) offers a fascinating example of the confusion that surrounds this cultural evolutionary expectation of the development of religion as it implicates prayer. Tylor felt that "primitive prayer" was heartfelt and that only with the rise of formal religions broadly practiced did prayer become formulaic and repetitive, losing its spontaneity and directness of connection between person and deity. This of course is the opposite of what prayer should have been in terms of magic, comprised of highly repetitive formulae. Gladys Reichard's 1932 study of Navajo prayer was titled *Prayer: The Compulsive Word* (New York: J. J. Augustin, 1944) indicating her understanding of the magical power of Navajo prayer acts.

than religion and furthermore, given these structural and performative characteristics, how on earth does one interpret the texts of prayers? The very repetitive formulaic character distinctive of prayer, like the "bar bar bar" stammering child-speak of barbarians and primitives, seems to defy the very idea of meaning because of its predictability and redundancy, yet meaning is the goal commonly sought by our retrograde backfilling external academic techniques. Indeed, to anticipate my discussion of gesture, I believe we academics do not study religion in any sense wherein our interests are even open to the full range of human religious experience and actions. Rather we recognize as religious and thus of interest to our study primarily those things that most closely correspond with our own gestural/postural composition.[236]

There are a couple other expectations that seem to thwart our approach to comprehending and appreciating prayer. One of these is the character of the "to" component that seems distinctive to prayer. Prayers seem necessarily spoken or addressed or directed to some "other," that is, some one or thing beyond the praying "self." Yet, the other is no ordinary existent in the banal environment. Prayers are addressed to gods, deities, spirits, the cosmos, figures in stories, animals, mythic beings, even abstract ideas—all characterizable as of an order apart from the ordinary plane of human reality or at least inaccessible through quotidian channels of human communication (i.e., email or texting). Prayer seems to be addressed to someone or something and the identity of the "to" is often indicated right there in the words spoken. Yet, the "to" is invariably *theós* or *numina*, that is, a being of another world or dimension or even an abstraction. I identify/label this "to" using the generic word "impossible" on the grounds that there are no banal means of contact or communication. I suggest that the very impossibility of commonplace connection or communication is a distinctive marker of prayer. Perhaps, surely, this is why prayer is so strongly associated with religion. This is why the notion of secular prayer is so difficult to imagine. I'm invoking the hopefully provocative term impossible to avoid any obvious

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[236] Put more plainly, we are most comfortable studying white guys that read and write.

specifically identifiable theological projections onto prayer although this effort itself seems almost impossible for academics to avoid.[237] Perhaps a slightly more sophisticated way of presenting this attribute as an important marker of prayer/religion is that prayer makes the unapologetic proclamation of what, to avoid theological predisposition, I call "possible impossibles." Using words and actions, praying makes present (or possible) what is distinguished, in part, as of a reality or order inaccessible (or impossible) by banal communication methods.

Since prayer appears to be directed to or at some radical other, a whole range of academic issues is bound to arise. Who or what is this other? Why do repetition and formulae appeal to it? Why are these prayer attributes somehow distinctively appropriate to this impossible other? What about the implication of the commonly expected "return" aspect of the prayer action; that is, is there anything like an answer or evidence of justification for the speech act? Is anybody or anything listening and responding? In general terms what I'm attempting to describe is what some traditions often refer to as the effectiveness of prayer captured in phrases like "Prayer really works." Minimally "why pray?" Prayer results were the concern of Huck Finn,

> Miss Watson she took me in the closet and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray every day, and whatever I asked for I would get it. But it warn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It warn't any good to me without hooks. I tried for the hooks three or four times, but somehow I couldn't make it work. By and by, one day, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she

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[237] I'm now fondly calling this near impossibility by the term "the Humpty Principle" which I introduced in *Dancing Culture Religion* (Lexington Books, 2012). It refers to the near impossibility of avoiding something we set out to avoid. Should we not wish to prejudice a study of religion with the history of our own beliefs (religious or worldview) we just can't do it. The very statement of the issue already invokes the issue we wish to avoid. I derive the name of this in my discussions of how impossible such tasks are as solving the "mind/body problem." The point here is that in setting it forth as a split that needs to be healed, we are attempting the same task as did all the king's horses and all the king's men. And we know how that came out.

said I was a fool. She never told me why, and I couldn't make it out no way.[238]

One would think that this concern with the results or effect of prayer is nearly essential to include in a general account of prayer, despite the risk of being a fool. We're often in Huck's place wondering about the effect. Usually we try, perhaps in our efforts to demonstrate the sophistication of our understanding of religion, to separate ourselves from admitting the importance of the effect as a significant aspect of the prayer (seems embarrassingly crass and materialistic);[239] we do this even though we all know that among the greatest motivators for extemporaneous prayer is the urgent beseeching that one not be visited by some impending doom. Again, since such repetition of formulas with an expectation of something to this-worldly and banal to happen seems more in the realm of magic, at least in the way the study of religion has come to terms with such things, so it seems that the academic study has come to pretty much the same conclusion as did Huck, "at last I reckoned I wouldn't worry about it any more, but just let it go." Yet here we are back at it, hoping that Miss Watson or our own academic wits might help us to "make it out."

In a lecture "'Now you see it, now you won't': The Future of the Academic Study of Religion over the Next 40 Years" delivered at the University of Colorado in 2012 Jonathan Z. Smith listed gesture studies as one of five areas he believes will be central to the upcoming generation of religion scholarship. Smith's statement related to gesture shocked me largely because

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[238] Mark Twain, *Huckleberry Finn* (1884).

[239] We often reject this pragmatic question of prayer because to do so places us firmly in the uncomfortable understanding of the "impossibles." How can a god give us fishhooks because we pray for them? Such issues force together aspects of practicality that we carefully try to keep separate. Yet, I would suggest that the very distinction of prayer is to address the impossibles as possible and to do so unapologetically. We have such trouble studying religion because we don't acknowledge that the impossibles are there purposefully to create chiasm, to establish copresent implication, to distinguish the uncrossable/crossable gap that forever energizes vitality, movement, tradition. I anticipate the outcome of the proposition: as prayer goes so goes religion.

it seems so unexpected in not being based exclusively on text materials and it excited me because it connects so closely to the long history and current interests of my own work in ritual and dance and performance. In my 2012 book *Dancing Culture Religion* I suggest the inadequacy of our most common understanding of gesture as "visual action as utterance" based on a communication model.[240] Clearly this "poor" understanding of gesture will not work for broader culture studies. In that book on dancing, I developed an expanded or "rich" understanding of gesture that gave me opportunity to explore the potential of such a view for the application to and analysis of religious and cultural actions; I find the results to be happily exciting. Since beginning to explore the implications of gesture, richly conceived, I have found that the power and insights gained through the consideration of gesture are deeply enhanced when seen as copresent with posture and prosthesis, when both are also richly conceived. The three together form a theoretical complex and heuristic nexus and in the present context of the study of prayer I want to use it to offer a hopefully novel and insightful perspective on prayer (and as prayer so religion); I'll refer to Navajo prayer to illustrate.

This nexus of gesture posture and prosthesis deserves an extended account that engages the many nuances of not only each term but also the copresent implications of the three pairs. While an extended account must be done later, here I want to at least sketch a few core ideas.

Both the plasticity and stability of all animate organisms is an affair of self-moving. Through evolution self-moving is copresent with the emergence of the distinctive morphology and motility of the animate species. Repetition and seeming redundancy are essential to the skillful acts of perception and knowing, that is, the transcending power of the organism to interconnect with its environing world. Self-moving, corresponding with the living force, is not acquired; it is inseparable from life itself engaging the whole organism, not simply some

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[240] Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visual Action as Utterance* (Cambridge University Press, 2004).

of its parts (body or mind).[241] It is the very nature of, as it is essential to, this organic living movement to be distinctively routinized and patterned and resounding and skillful and seemingly, through endless repetition, experienced as natural, though of course it is not. Organisms are distinctive (both species and individuals) in terms of the characteristic patterns of self-moving; in the broadest terms think quadrupedal and bipedal. As perceiving knowing living beings inseparable from their connections with their environment (the essential other in their midst) animate organisms[242] are distinguished by gestures, acquired skillful distinctive patterns of self-moving. Gesture is posturally based both in the sense of the neurobiological core that enables the distinctive patterned self-moving (upright posture corresponds with bipedal motility) as well as in terms of the more abstract value attributes (concepts, beliefs, images, memories). Gesture, as all self-moving, can occur only in relation to some environment that enables moving. The relational aspect of moving is described by Renaud Barbaras in the terms of "desire and distance."[243] That is, self-moving must always be in the process of self-transcendence in that it is inseparable from becoming there. Moving is never in any place but is always an entwining of or the copresence of here and there. It is in the transcendent power of gesture/posture that is at the core of perception and knowing, both sensible only as the copresence of self and other, here and there.

Carrie Noland's 2009 book *Agency & Embodiment: Performing Gesture/Producing Culture* offers insight and inspiration as she articulates gesture as key to understanding agency. Noland's observation that Maurice Merleau-Ponty and André Leroi-Gourhan both "viewed the body as a sensorium extending itself prosthetically through gesture into the world"[244] is important to understanding the architecture of human connections with and

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[241] See Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy of Movement* (John Benjamins Publishing Company; 2nd edition, 2011) and Renaud Barbaras, *Desire and Distance: Introduction to a Phenomenology of Perception* (Stanford University Press, 2005).

[242] Husserl's term and a good one.

[243] Barbaras, *Desire and Distance*.

[244] Carrie Noland, *Agency & Embodiment: Performing Gesture/Producing Culture* (Harvard University Press, 2009), 5.

actions on the community and environment. These two scholars among others considered the living moving body as a sensorium, that is, as the hierarchical composite of sensory capacities. They consider the body as existing always in the process of encountering the world through gesture, that is, skilled processes that require the extension or prosthesis of the body beyond its physical perimeters. The term prosthetic suggests a means of supplementing and extending the biological body beyond its mere physical limits. This extension suggests that we can use aspects of the body, themselves, as tools in some sense to extend ourselves into the world, to know it and ourselves, and to have an impact on the world. Prosthesis suggests an extension beyond self, a transcendence beyond biological limits, beyond the recognized boundary marked by our skin, by the self that we feel as the ongoingness of moving.[245] Yet, of course, we know that we are through and through biological. The prosthetic aspect of the animate body, its capacity to use itself or parts of itself as a tool, are highly interesting in that prosthesis must exist if we are to avoid total containment, isolation, separation, immobility; in psychological (perhaps also philosophical) terms aloneness.[246] Yet, this insight related to prosthesis is but a restatement of the radical view of self-moving; that self-moving essentially requires a moving in the context of other, that environment is copresent with self. Moving implicates a there that twines as moving with here; a virtual unmeasurable distance of separation that is also connection; a horizon always beckoning yet always receding.

Gesture is the sort of moving, as Marcel Mauss so effectively showed, that is invariably stamped by the distinctive markers of culture, environment, history, psychology that enables us to not only take in the world but also to act on the world, which we'll

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[245] Of course, in common reference prosthesis is very closely associated with amputation and loss. This immediate connection surely dates from the American Civil War when tens of thousands of amputees survived the war and the development of prosthetic limbs gained greater attention. In the more philosophical sense, there is often a sense of loss connected with the notion of prosthesis, yet it is my intention to avoid this implication at least here.

[246] Not loneliness because that implies a longing for a missed other. By aloneness I want to try to imagine a world with no other.

see is to understand sensation/perception/knowing as agentive, as a force acting on and in the world.[247] Mauss, referring to gesture as "techniques of body," held that there is no natural or perfect gesture; the contextual skilled practicing of living always shapes it. Thus the sensorium is connected with culture, history, and psychology by means of gesture, the sort of moving that interactively engages the sensorium prosthetically with the environment, both a discovery and a worlding.[248] Gesture (inseparable from the sensorium) is the prosthetic (the extension beyond the organic confines of the body; that is, beyond the skin) that extends the body beyond itself in an interaction with the world. Gesture is the looping reversible circulating chiasmatic interconnection among people (and animate organisms generally) and between people and the environment. It is by means of the moving of gesture that we are imprinted with, constantly absorbing, the influences of culture, history, environment, experience; it is by means of the self-moving of gesture that we have agency, power, effect on the world we live in. We create and discover ourselves and the other in the gestural/ postural/prosthetic actions of self-moving always shaped by and, in turn, shaping culture, history, psychology.

I know this introduction to gesture/posture/prosthesis is far too dense and brief and I have yet to consider prayer in these terms, yet to help prepare for that discussion I'll iterate, repeat, in alternative terms. An academic gesture or a practice of magic? Gesture enables the body or parts of the body to become prosthetic or extensions to the body thus expanding the body into the space beyond the body's sensate limitations. This prosthetic capacity of the body is the opening towards the construction of tools of every sort from spear points to tablet computers. All tools, some of which are body parts (Leroi-Gourhan believed the hand to be the first tool; I believe it the finger, more fun) extend the body prosthetically into the world for purposes of connecting with, palpating if you will, the world

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[247] Marcel Mauss' classic 1934 essay "Techniques of Body" lays the groundwork for demonstrating that "gesture," that is, techniques of body, are never either "natural" or "perfect," but always formed in the influential context of culture, history, and psychology.

[248] Worlding is Erin Manning's term, see her *Relationscapes: Movement, Art, Philosophy* (MIT Press, 2012).

about us. Gesture then can be characterized as groping. Noland discusses Leroi-Gourhan's use of the French term *tâtonnement*, which means trial and error, but also refers to the groping movement of the hand/finger or other body part as prosthesis.[249] But this groping is not simply random. Sensorimotor programs, synaptic criteria demanded by coordination dynamics, and developing proprioceptive-muscular acuities, direct it. Maxine Sheets-Johnstone suggests that we come into the world moving, groping, as the means of discovering the world and ourselves.[250] This process continues throughout life in all gestural actions in that they are skillful sensorimotor/muscular movings. Even more importantly, gesture is self-adjusting, self-correcting, progressively refined, based on experience. Repetition has a central and crucial value to accumulating experience.[251] Gesturing does something to effect the world; it has agency. It explores the world in the same way a physician palpates a patient's body. Not only does gesture do simple things like get attention or offend others, but also, as Leroi-Gourhan believes, the development of gestural patterns leads to the invention of tools; this was a central contribution to his work in paleo-ethnography.[252] Movement, he argues and it seems obvious, necessarily precedes the development of tools. It is the movings of the body and the use of the body or its parts as tools that is then extended beyond the body with the invention of tools. The body's movings are projected prosthetically beyond the body in the creation and use of tools. Where the fist can serve as a ram or a hammer, the invention and construction of material tools, wooden rams and steel hammers, has the effect of amplifying and multiplying the gestural effect, multiplying the power of gestural agency.

The invention of speech and writing and print are examples of tools. One aspect common to all gesture is the agentive concern of interrogation or exploration. As in palpating, we reach out with hand or tool or voice to learn about our environ-

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[249] Noland, *Agency & Embodiment,* 105

[250] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *The Primacy of Movement*, 139.

[251] Experience is accumulated as synaptic criteria and forms neuronal groups based on reentrant neurobiological coordination dynamics.

[252] See Leroi-Gourhan, *Gesture and Speech* (The MIT Press, 1993).

ment. We can understand the interrogative aspect of gesture (tool use) in terms of proprioception or kinesthetics (the feeling aspect of proprioception). As we move and encounter the environment, our proprioceptors register the effect of performing the gesture both as feel and as musculoskeletal feedback that impacts our biology to the extent of changing our tissues (I mean this change literally). As the ram encounters the wall, as the hammer encounters the nail, as the speech act is uttered in a cultural context (the encounter is perhaps dialog) we learn many things (actually everything)—the consistency and composition of the wall, the reaction of the ram to hitting the wall, the specific parameters of identification with our speaking community, and so forth, all as feelings and motor-responses sensed and recorded by our proprioceptive system. Even our brains, Leroi-Gourhan argued, and Noland found it supported, developed in evolutionary terms in response to the advancements in motility, thus gestural acumen, rather than the other way around.[253] Gesture is always encounter; always complex loopings and twinings. Encounter is always felt proprioceptively. Proprioceptive experience provides modifications via adjustments to synaptic criteria, sensorimotor programs, memory, and concepts; stated alternately, modifications to proprioceptive-muscular acumen. Gestures are skillsets and the repeating performance of the action increases the level of skill. Gestures are not only what we do, how we move; gestures are also who we are in that they are inscribed in our biology involving muscle, proprioceptor, neuronal grouping, and coordination dynamics—all aspects of moving.

Clearly no skillful palpation is possible with a single iteration. There is an implication in palpation itself, the exploratory repetitive aspect of groping. Yet, perhaps the reason that medicine is referred to as art and as practice is because it depends on methods that always continue to improve with repetition and experience (present and accumulated). Repetition functions to improve the skills of palpation in at least two ways. As the physician, in this case, knows from textbooks and

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[253] I much prefer to understand these as co-developing. I can't imagine that either could, in the long view of evolution, develop prior to and thus give causal rise to the other.

anatomy classes what her palpating is "seeing" in some touching sense, subsequent surgery allows the confirmation or adjustment of what is truly there. Secondly, like a ballerina at the *barre* repeating designated movements thousands of times under the critical direction of a ballet mistress, the act of palpating a patient under the careful supervision of an experienced physician, leads to building skill residing as accumulated experience in sensori-motor programs, neuronal groupings, and perceptual/knowing acuity. Repetition is essential; repetition is nuanced and sophisticated.[254] What we typically do not understand is the magnitude of repetition necessary; indeed, it is often high, very high. Repetition is also linked with plasticity. We are constructed so that our experience clearly has an impact on our biology, yet fortunately, we are plastic/changeable usually only as the result of high repetition. Otherwise, incidental experiences might have too profound an effect on our skills and they wouldn't endure.[255] Gesture is movement that allows us to be at once prosthetic (tool, technique) and sensate feeling beings and, more importantly, to be both at once; the copresent implications of animate organism. Merleau-Ponty referred to this copresence also as "double sensation."[256]

Now many, if not all, animate organisms have this gesture/posture/prosthetic capability, yet surely it is distinctive of humans to have self-awareness of our gesturing as *at once* techniques, tools, prosthetics and also simply being (existing as) sensing feeling knowing organisms. There is no clear boundary between the two, between being and having awareness of being,

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[254] The common description of higher education as "training" used to offend me somewhat. However, the more I appreciate the remarkable and essential importance of gesture, and to appreciate that gesture is inseparable from skill acquisition and use, the more I am willing to embrace this old terminology. Indeed, I think there are many distinct advantages of understanding the training of religion scholars (or those of any discipline) on the medical school model where book learning is seen as essential and demanding, but that it is incomplete without laboratory and clinical experience (or the equivalent) carefully monitored by an experienced mentor.

[255] This is an overgeneralized statement; I'm aware that the actual mechanics of plasticity are remarkably complex.

[256] Cited by Carrie Noland, *Agency & Embodiment*, 110.

although it is commonly assumed that such a strict boundary exists. There is no clear boundary among animate organisms (species) separating those who are aware from those who are not; yet there is no arguable point at all that humans are remarkable because of the extent of our awareness and our gestural acumen to objectify, express, and interrogate this distinction. Gesture is moving that is synesthetic in that it crosses among the senses and combines them. The movings of gesture create knowledge, images, feelings that can be specific to any sensory channel or to cross among and combine them; however, gesture always connects with the world as world, not as streams of sensory isolated material bits that then need somehow to be combined.

Tools, prosthetics, are gesturally based, argues Leroi-Gourhan, and thus it is in the probing groping movings of the body that we not only construct the world about us but we also experience it, that is, sense and feel its reality. Musical instruments are prosthetics that extend—using body gestures we refer to as playing—ourselves into the world and we hear the world that we make; the making is comprised of the gestural patternings/skills of making the instrument, the skill in playing the instrument, and the resounding worlding of the music flowing into, manifesting in, the environment. We can also think of the actively driven use of our individual senses in the same terms as we think of palpation. For example, when we say, "I looked carefully at that painting," are we not using our eyes in the same way that a physician uses her palpating fingers? When we say, "I listened intently to that music," are we not using our ears in the same way that a physician uses her palpating fingers? Are we not transforming our eyes and ears into tools, techniques, that actively prosthetically extend our senses into the world to explore and penetrate it, by means of gesture, for we move our eyes to see a painting and we turn our heads to listen intently to music? Yet, even when we concentrate on a single sense—looking or listening—we do not explore the world sense by sense and then add them together in some secondary constructive or synthesizing operation. We sense the world as the world as it is present to us, as we have access to it; not attributes separated by sensory channels. Perception is iconic in Peircian terms; whole and already together, for that is how we

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encounter the world as the world even as we are also construct-
ing it, making it present, by perceiving it. Yet, we know that this
ability to prostheticize our bodies, part by part, function by
function, or in its entirety (think dancing), is always paired with
the intimate proprioceptively trained feeling kind of knowing
that is both recognition and evaluation. Indeed, I think a good
case can be made for perception and knowing being as much
recognition as discovery. Perception always engages the full
experience of our perceiving lives compacted into what I term
"experiential neuronal ensemblings" and these profiles are
always an aspect of every perceiving. These looping functions
that feed forward and backward are complementary and essen-
tial to one another. We listen to music, as the skilled physician
palpates a patient, recognizing so many things—rhythm, melo-
dy, color, our favorite artists, even the events and emotions
associated with a particular song, and so on—which demands
that we already know in some sense what we are hearing,
recognition. But despite recognition and foreknowledge, it is
also always experience and experience is always new in some
respects, if only in its being present (or in its presence), in its
potential for novelty (nonlinearity); a comparative listening
responding to the variations of what we hear with our expecta-
tions, our foreknowledge; evaluation.

A major contribution of Leroi-Gourhan was to recognize
that as it developed in humans, gesture led to the distinction of
humans in the capacity to develop external memory. First, it
should be noted that language (speech first) is to be understood
as a tool. Clearly to speak is a gestural extension of our bodies,
in an act of agency and expression. Jacques Derrida and Bernard
Stiegler both extensively developed this idea based on Leroi-
Gourhan.[257] A key notion however is simply that to use a tool
to mark on a wall, a gesture distinctive to hominins, establishes
an external counterpart to memory.[258] Amazing. Leroi-Gourhan

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[257] Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Johns Hopkins University Press,
1998) and Bernard Stiegler, *Techniques and Time*, 3 vols. (Stanford
University Press, 1998).

[258] I think it not accidental that prominent among the images of the
most ancient art in France and now in Indonesia are imprints of the
human hand with splayed fingers. Art is a quintessential act of
prosthesis and to represent the hand with splayed fingers is doubly

found the existence of external memory distinctive of being human and as being essential to human development linked with the advancement of tools that are associated with external memory—pens, printing press, typewriter, audio-recorder, video-recorder, computer, 3-D printer. All these, Leroi-Gourhan holds, are based in gesture.

Returning to prayer, what now might be said? What does this discourse on self-moving, gesture, posture, prosthesis have to do with prayer? It is my hope that it provides a context for more fully comprehending repetitive formulaic speech acts that will provide an enriched way of approaching prayer as theory and practice, and religion as well. Let me start with the Navajo prayer acts I described at the outset. Navajo prayer is gesture in numerous respects. As the ritual act of prayer, it involves not only well-known phrasing in the language of the prayer, the method of recitation also follows a prescribed style creating familiar sounds and sights. Singers (medicine persons) spend extensive periods of time in apprenticeship learning the huge body of improvisational skills—knowledge and gestural actions —that comprise the performances of healing rituals including the many complex prayer acts. A practicing singer constructs healing ceremonies both before and during its performance out of an amazingly rich body of components to treat specific individual and cultural needs. Extensive repetition and practice are essential to the acquisition of these skills. The act of prayer is set in a ritual context where there are numerous correspond-dences between the words spoken, the manner of recitation, the actions of the rites performed (sandpaintings, appearance of masked *diyin dine'e*, and dozens of other constituents), the physical environment (the hogan corresponds with the cosmic structure of Navajoland; it is microcosmic), the motivating circumstances (the specific causes, community and cosmic, indicated as cause for the illness being treated), the songs that are sung, and the broadly known stories summarized in the songs. The singer is not the only one for whom high repetition is essential. Every Navajo person participates in ritual actions,

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profound in presenting the human body part (the distinct fingers) that implicates prosthesis and the coincidence of the digital age with the rise of fingered *Homo sapiens*.

frequent among them prayers that create the very skills that are essential to being a Navajo person. Navajo identity is acquired and transmitted through the high gestural postural prosthetic repetition of distinctive phrases, sequences, orientations, sounds, correspondences of language to action that occur in prayers and in song, rite, story, and landscape. Such acts are so commonplace as to feel natural, just-so, to Navajo people.[259]

Navajo prayer as gestural act expresses, heals, teaches, and enculturates. In its references to life and relationship and Navajoland and cosmos, it creates by designating, ordering, and organizing. It also creates identity that is specifically Navajo by constituting techniques of body that mark Navajo identity. The repeated performance of these gestures/techniques amounts to an etching of this identity into human tissue, from synaptic criteria to the organization of muscle fibers.

The foundational principles (or structural characteristics) that underlie all these specified gestural actions can be considered as posture—the vital position, physical and ideological, that is Navajo identity. These postural characteristics are what Maxine Sheets-Johnstone referred to as "corporeal concepts" and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson called "image schemas" and "basic level categories."[260] The performance of these gestures constructs the bodies at their cores, their posture, of those involved in the patterns identified as Navajo; that is, the repetitions etch these corporeal concepts into the very tissue of Navajo people. Prayers do far more than establish belief, they construct moving Navajo living bodies.

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[259] In his "Techniques of Body," Mauss' observation that there are no natural techniques of body (gestures) is exceedingly important and necessary that we appreciate that we do not consider some (usually our own) gestures as natural and others (not ours) as somehow concocted and of lesser value. Yet, clearly repetition of techniques of body create for those performing/practicing these gestures a feeling that they are naturalized in the sense of simply given, compatible with reality as given, not consciously constructed.

[260] Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, *Primacy of Movement,* 438-9 George Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: What Categories Reveal about the Mind* (University of Chicago Press, 1989) 282-3 and Mark Johnson, *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason* (University of Chicago Press, 1987).

The prayer acts are prosthetic in that every aspect of these gestural acts reaches out beyond the physical bodies of the ritualists to connect with the immediate environment as well as in their broadest reach to the very acts of world creation and the fullest extent of Navajo imagination. In the farthest prosthetic reach these prayer acts invoke and engage—the "to" mentioned in the prayers—the *diyin dine'e*. This is the prosthetic distinction of prayer; it has the capacity to transcend the banal world to the farthest reaches of the imagination. The *diyin dine'e* reside as life-giving inner forms of the world, as beings on the "other side." These "to" figures named and invoked by being named in prayers are also made present through the gestural acts of sand-paintings and masked appearances. Prayers, in their utterance as well as in their structure, make present the radical other, making possible and accessible these impossibles. These acts are distinctive of prayer (and as prayer so also religion) by their prosthetic power to invoke the copresence of the here of human existence and the there of the beings of the other side, the *diyin dine'e*. Perhaps this power of prayer to cross among realities is why Navajos sometimes refer to prayer itself as person.[261] For the Navajo, the reach is to the world of origination and to the space and condition of beauty from which Navajo life proceeds. The Navajo gestural/postural/prosthesis nexus invokes the copresence of the various distinctions/realms of reality; a copresence on which vitality depends. At the full reach of prayer, the mark distinguishing prayer, the prosthesis is the copresence of the impossible and the possible; the world of the radically other beyond the banal is copresent with the ordinary.[262]

What is essential to recognize in these Navajo healing rites including prayer—and I believe to be also relevant to prayer (and religion) wherever it is found—is that in its prosthetic powers prayer achieves what should not be possible. The very distinction of the *diyin dine'e* is that they are other, apart, of the other side, of a different order of reality than humans, than

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[261] See Gill, "Prayer as Person"

[262] It is notable that masking may also accomplish this prosthetic function gesturally. The masked *diyin dine'e* bring the impossible presence of these radical other beings into the realm of physical ritual reality where it is possible to physically interact with Navajo people.

ordinary reality. Navajos are not *diyin dine'e* and *diyin dine'e* are not human.[263] Yet the impossible is achieved in prayer and certainly other gestural acts. The *diyin dine'e* are here in the spoken word, in their sandpainted presentation, and as masked beings. Yet all these acts construct a particular kind of presence or, better, copresence. In these gestural acts, there is a momentary copresence of the impossible and the possible. The inner forms, the beings of the other side, are here, yet they are also inner forms and beings of the other side. The interrogative powers of these prayer gestures show Navajos that health, life, and beauty in the ordinary world are twined (copresent) with the existence of and relation to these others. In prayer acts Navajos experience the vitalizing effect of this copresence, that is, of the necessary distinction and discontinuity (impossibility) of the ordinary world and the world beyond (the other side) but also their essential twining. Prayer and ritual are tools (prostheses) that allow this experience of impossibles/possibles. Unity or recon-ciliation is not what is accomplished. Rather what is accom-plished is a copresence, a structurality whose oscillatory effect is vitalizing.[264]

Navajo people, as well as many other Native Americans, often use the English word harmony to indicate something of central importance to their religious practice. Navajos have a more specific way of articulating results, effects, and that is *hozho* or beauty often depicted as a male-female pair of *diyin dine'e* named Long Life and Happiness (*sa'ah naaghaii bik'eh hozho*).[265] Many Navajo prayers conclude with the standard passage, "In beauty may I walk,"[266] often repeated four times. Importantly, beauty is understood in the context of self-moving, walking.

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[263] Risking slight overkill here I suggest that this condition is founda-tional to prayer wherever it is found. In Christianity, for example, the possible/impossible is even stronger; god is not human, yet god is man. There is a copresent implication at the core of Christology. If the first half of this statement of theological copresence did not pertain, then there would be no prayer or the possibility of prayer.

[264] I am aware that this is not adequately argued here, but it can be, and I do so in other writings.

[265] See Gill, *Sacred Words*, p. 54 for discussion of this term.

[266] See Gill, *Sacred Words*, p. 31 for discussion of the constituent associated with this distinctive phrase.

This is consistent with the verbal character of Navajo language where everything is understood in terms of its moving, its action, its behavior. In Navajo language it is difficult to refer to a fixed non-moving object. Beauty then is self-moving, or I might suggest gesture characterized by certain conditions, techniques of body. Those conditions are for the Navajo the vitalizing relationship between opposing interacting pairs of all sorts, compounded at many levels: east/west, north/south, below the surface/on the surface, outer form/inner form, this human side/the other *diyin dine'e* side, male/female, Long Life/ Happiness and so on often compounding by repeatedly pairing other pairings. Beauty is not stasis or unity or fixedness or stability or being centered; it is the resounding qualities, harmonic resonances of twinings; a twoness wherein each part demands the other both for its distinction as well as its realization, a oneness.

The Navajo sense of beauty is not so distant from Friedrich Schiller's understanding as developed in his *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795) as the rise of an interplay or play drive (*Speiltrieb*) when two opposing drives, *Formtrieb* and *Sinnestrieb* for example, interact in concert.[267] Schiller identified this play with beauty; in play there is beauty. Indeed, he wrote, "Man only plays when he is in the fullest sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays." In Navajo terms the importance of retaining the distinctions at play is ritually marked as well. At sunrise on the last morning of these multiple-day healing rites the one-sung-over is conducted out of the hogan some distance to the east to greet the rising sun. Here the final prayers of the ceremonial complex are recited. They mark the return to the banal (non-ritual) world but also the copresence of the two—the ritual world and the world of daily Navajo life. This moment is the paragon of walking in beauty where there is felt connection between the world of order or beauty—posturally established in creation and re-established in prayer acts and other rites of healing—and the world of daily life invariably characterized by the nonlinearity of novelty; the presence of the

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[267] Friedrich Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man* (1795).

unexpected inseparable from creativity. Navajos articulate novelty in terms of illness.[268]

Understood in terms of the gestural/postural/prosthesis nexus, Navajo religious life, including prayer, can be appreciated as the artful skilled performance of self-moving marked as distinctively Navajo. Health and life are constantly negotiated by these skilled actions in the perpetual presence of illness and death. That copresence established through the gestural skills of prayer acts, among other techniques of body, is the heart of Navajo vitality.

The repetition of Navajo prayers and the associated ritual acts of the healing rites is an essential aspect of the gestural postural character of these acts. Repeatedly experiencing these gestures all stamped firmly with those orientations and patterns of moving that extend from the most personal to the most cosmic is the cultural method of gaining and honing the gestural skill to be Navajo and to feel one's identity to be Navajo. Through the constant repetition of these gestural acts Navajos become shaped to reflect the distinctive values of their history, their tradition, and their culturally marked environment. Such repetition is fundamental both to being enculturated as Navajo as well as having the distinctively Navajo skills to act with agency in the world and to respond to novelty.[269] Agency and identity are dependent on gestural acumen gained through repetition.

For Navajos as prayer goes so goes religion. Navajo prayer is a nested constituent of the larger performance and practice and experience of Navajo religion.[270] The repetitive and formulaic character of Navajo prayer is consistent with the balance of

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[268] Navajos have other ways of indicating this relationship. Commonly they avoid closed circles in weaving patterns and basket designs and even in sandpaintings. This openness or gap is an explicit way of emphasizing the vitalizing effect of chiasm.

[269] A fascinating example of responding to novelty is found in how Navajo Enemyway was developed from its roots in the encounter of the dead enemies from warring tribes to a rite often performed for Navajo men who served in combat for the US military. But then, of course, constant change occurs with the performance of every religious act.

[270] The twining of various levels of ritual and cultural structuralities was the fundamental argument of my *Sacred Words*.

Navajo ritual and practice. For example, as a ritual speech act Navajo prayer participates in the formulaic gestural orientational sequence "feet legs body mind voice;" the voice reciting the prayers and singing the songs that are gestural/postural skilled acts of being Navajo. These speech acts engage the prosthetic actions of interrelating and entwining the individual and even the religious culture with the full history and physical environment that are distinctly Navajo. This Navajo gestural postural prosthesis nexus of prayer and religion, connecting through prayer with the impossibles does not accomplish some ending stability; they do not represent health. Rather what is accomplished is a vitalizing relationality that occurs with the presence effected through prayer and ritual acts of those whose presence among humans is impossible in the ontological sense that they are of the other side or they are inner forms or the *diyin dine'e*. The fishhook sought by Navajos in prayer is not full recovery from a specific illness. Indeed, Navajo healing ceremonies are performed both for those who are known to be terminally ill and incurable as well as those who have gained health (from the perspective of symptoms) through other means such as in Western medical clinics. Rather it seems that Navajos seek life lived in the vitalizing ongoing relationship of the presence of what apart from the skillful practice of religion cannot be present; the copresence of the there and the here, the possible and the impossible, that is at the heart of self-moving, of walking in beauty.

I imagine the first prosthetic human act to be the pointing of a finger[271] stretched at arm's length. Gesturally this act directs the eye to the finger there but extends the eye to effect a connection of the pointing finger with some thing beyond the finger, to some thing over there. The gesture of the pointing finger engages a transcending of the physical body while it creates a connection between the body and something other, a thing that is over there yet in perceiving it, in recognizing it, is also here. Thing there becomes distinguished and stands out in the envir-

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[271] A slight irony here in the context of the study of Navajos is that they never point with a finger, but rather with their lips, yet even this offers potential for understanding the distinctions of Navajos in terms of the gestural prosthesis nexus.

onment in this prosthetic gesturing. Thing becomes identified with the pointing finger whose very gesture creates it in some sense. The interplay of this gestural prosthetics characterizes both the digital and the theological. The digital is the correspondence between the finger (digit) and the thing pointed out/created. The prosthetic correlation of finger with thing is the dawning of the digital age. The theological is the correspondence between the pointing finger and the fullest extent of the prosthetic imaginable, what Charles Sanders Peirce described in his essay "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God."[272] It is not incidental that this essay is Peirce's finest discussion of play and his lifelong interest in hypothetic inference (abduction). Such pointing gives rise to the notion of transcendence both to there and upon a half hour of idle musement to There. Of course, these ideas are my own fanciful exercise in attempting to describe a generic gestural postural prosthesis nexus that might apply to the distinctions of religion and prayer, academically constructed through fits and halts.

Here are finally, to me, the most important issues in the discussion of prayer as a comparative religious form of action. The formulaic and repetitive character of prayer must be understood as the acquisition of the skill, not unlike that involved with playing music or sport. Formula and repetition must be valued positively as contributions to the accumulation of experience that builds acumen, agency, identity, and beauty. In this respect gestural acts are inseparable from posture/position. These gestural acts of prayer have a prosthetic function and that is to transcend the performer of the act, as does any speech act. It has the agentive power to create relationship and, in turn, identity. The prosthetic distinction of prayer is its reach; it dares unapologetically to invoke (make present) by naming that/those whose nature is the impossible—the unknowable, the unfathomable, that which has no name, that which is its own self, that which is beyond, that which is identified with origin or unity or totality, those of the other side or the inner form, those of a mythic era or a storied place. Prayer affects the copresence of

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[272] *Hibbert's Journal* (1908). Interestingly, since I've previously referred to Schiller regarding play, as a youth Peirce intensely studied Schiller's *Letters*.

the possible and impossible, not for reconciliation or resolution, but for the vitalizing movings, a sounding and resounding, that such a copresence engenders. And finally, as Marcel Mauss showed, all such gestural/postural/prosthetic actions are distinctly shaped by culture, history, and psychology. He showed that there is no perfect or natural gesture; gesture can exist only as a bearer of the distinctive markers (posture/position) of culture, history, and experience. Prayer is always bodied. Prayer as a comparative religious category is, I suggest, distinctive in terms of at least these criteria. Yet as prayer is distinctive to specific cultural and historical settings, the narrower postural distinctions of specific prayer traditions correlate with the specific religions in which they occur.

There is a double sense in which we might hold that as prayer goes so goes religion. One is in the broad theoretical sense of academic comparative studies; as we come to develop our theoretical understanding of prayer in this gestural/postural/ prosthesis nexus, we cannot help but also enrich our understanding and appreciation of religion. The other sense is in terms of the narrower study of a particular religion or religious community or religious person. As we use this account of prayer to help us articulate what distinguishes culturally and historically specific prayer acts and practices, we cannot help but also improve our understanding of what specifically distinguishes this particular religion or religious tradition or religious practice.

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Dancing Lessons
A Biological & Philosophical Account of Human Distinctiveness as Relevant to the Proper Study of Religion[273]

Dancing Lessons

Thirty-five years ago, my dancing life was in tension with my academic life. Almost no one in the academic study of religion has focused on dancing despite the near synonymy of religion and dancing in most cultures. My academic and dancing lives gradually merged as I studied dancing and religion in many cultures while constantly dancing and teaching dancing. I learned much about dances the world over, but my many thousands of hours of dancing amounted to a makeover. I will offer a brief example to show a bit of the work I do. A dancing lesson if you will.

Social dancing includes a physical connection between partners. It is a light active touching of the hands of the partners moving their bodies together following simple conventions. The word movement indicates change of place, a halt. The study of religion, indeed academia generally, tends to seek the halt required of place: maps, principles, categories, classifications, meaning, explanation. Eliade's "center", Smith's "to take place". As a dancer I prefer the active verb moving because the joy is in the dancing. The essence of moving is being in no place. Erin Manning describes moving as "becoming toward a potential

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[273] A Roundtable convened at the American Academy of Religion Annual Meeting, Denver, Colorado, November 20, 2022. Forthcoming in *Body & Religion*, 2024. The introductory sections of this paper have been dropped.

future that will always remain not-yet." I often use the compound term self-moving to distinguish biologically active moving from passive moving such as in riding in a bus. Touching requires self-moving. In dancing this self-moving touching is the biological mechanism for the communication and artful coordination essential to partner dancing.

Remarkably, this self-moving touching is at the core of the philosophical concerns of the eighteenth-century French philosophers Condillac and Maine de Biran who were interested in what awakens a sense of self, the awareness of being, thus opening the door to acquiring knowledge. They posed a man possessing all the human senses, yet inactive indicated by composing him of marble. Condillac argued that this man would need only a moving hand that would eventually touch his own torso. He thought the feeling of solidity or mass of this encounter would awaken the man's senses and awareness. He was referring to proprioception, as it would eventually be known, an inner touch. This self-moving touching is essential to partner dancers and to the groping actions of newborns. Fifty years later Maine de Biran, anticipating kinesthesia, held that the marble man need not touch himself, he only needed to move his hand noting that there is a sensation in moving itself residing in its effort. The contemporary philosopher Brian Massumi captures this insight in the opening sentences of his *Parables for the Virtual*, writing, "When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn the name, two things stand out. It moves. It feels. In fact, it does both at the same time. It moves as it feels, and it feels itself moving."

Philosophers in the 20th and 21st centuries explored the ongoingness of moving, yet almost without exception they use the halting noun "movement," rather than the active verb "moving." Identifying the primacy of moving as distinctive to animals, Edmund Husserl coined the term "animate organism." He also reflected on the experience of hand-touching hand-being-touched to show the "double sensation" humans acknowledge as the reversible relationship of perceiver and perceived. Merleau-Ponty took up this hand-touching-hand example to explore and to articulate his ideas of chiasm and reversibility in the construction of his theory of perception. Then, by analogy, he applied the self-moving-touching bodied experience to reality

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itself. He believed this "flesh ontology," as he termed it, to be "the ultimate truth." More recently in his *Desire and Distance* offering a phenomenology of perception, Renaud Barbaras wrote, "It is movement [moving] itself that perceives."

Had Husserl and Merleau-Ponty engaged self-moving touching like partner dancers, rather than only their own two hands, their insights might have been richer and more fun. Still these philosophers' insights and concepts were originated, inspired, and exemplified based on their own physical experience of self-moving touching. While we assume concepts to be abstract creations in the mind, focusing on the primacy of moving shows that, thought has content only because of experience, always bodied, and ideas are only worth developing if fueled by corporeal feelings of assurance.

Coherence is denoted by designating us as animate organisms. Given the complexity and variability of the systems comprising our biology, not to mention our constant encounter with our ever-changing environment, I find biological coherence astonishing. By the early twentieth century what was imagined by the early French philosophers had become biological knowledge. Nobelist neuroscientist and discoverer of the synapse, Sir Charles Sherrington discovered and named this inner touch "proprioception" or "self-perception." Proprioceptors located in the muscles and ligaments conjoin neuron and muscle in the sensing of the ongoingness of moving to refine it for efficiency and to prevent injury and, as they do so, kinesthesia offers the feeling qualities of ongoing moving. Evolution has built into our biology the dynamic of congruity always paired with incongruity. The specific coloring of kinesthetic feelings correlates with the continuum of biological congruity and incongruity. Russian physiologist Nikolai Bern-stein's studies show that our bodies have evolved so that efficient moving that minimizes injury is smooth, not jerky. Smooth moving biologically correlates with health, ease, efficiency, congruity. Jerkiness warns of the absence of these qualities, of pathology. There is a biological basis for why we seek congruity. Yet incongruity plays an essential role. Paul Ricoeur pointed out that "incongruity gives rise to thought." Jonathan Smith wrote positively of the "ordeal of incongruity." Agency is fueled by incongruity. Charles Sanders Peirce showed that the feeling of incongruity we call "surprise"

is the creative force that drives hypothetic inference and thus the acquisition of all new knowledge. Life is the ongoing skilled negotiation of incongruity and congruity with evolution building in a biological preference for congruity as well as the creative engagement of incongruity.

I propose that the common biology of proprioception/kinesthesia offers the feeling-based measure for all dynamic creative encounters. Societies, religions, and individuals create many systems comprised of gestures, skills, ways of life, practices that offer a bodied milieu of identity and familiarity experienced as feeling right or just-so or ours or mine or tradition. While such feeling experiences are attached to vastly different actions and practices when comparing individuals and societies, they are all biologically based in kinesthetic feelings. Appreciating difference requires accounting for how complex self-adjusting systems construct and engage specific skills, gestures, and patterns of expectations, that affect feelings measured in terms of smooth moving as based in the biology of proprioception and kinesthesia.

The presence of and communication with the other is, for the partner dancer, gained not in some data collection or recording mechanism imprinting the information on a screen in our brains to be rationally processed into artful action. It is not objectifiable or the product of reason. It cannot be understood as objective change of place. It is, rather, a feeling kind of knowing of the ongoingness of the exchange inseparable from moving. It is the force of moving itself that communicates. Condillac and Maine de Biran knew this. As does Renaud Barbaras who wrote, that moving is "the generative source of our primal sense of aliveness and of our primal capacity for sense-making."

The Ending Dip

As students of religion what might we learn from this dancing lesson?
1 Taking the primacy of moving radically avoids the unfortunate hierarchical dualities of the Cartesian *cogito*. Moving body has primacy. It is not the "and also" or vehicle to mind. It is not a niche concern.

2   The proprioceptive/kinesthetic aspect essential to moving gives a biological and philosophical common ground for the appreciation of difference and the creativity of encounter.
3   As the biology of moving has evolved to privilege coherence it has also evolved to respond creatively to the experience of incoherence. The biological standard for the evaluation of the degrees of congruity and incongruity is the quotidian feeling of smooth moving.
4   Cultures and religions reflect the biological valuation of coherence and incoherence by building specific practices, gestures, postures, habits, skills that, while themselves are not natural, with repetition become gesturally naturalized to the extent of feeling just-so to their adherents. These gestures and postures are prosthetically extended in art, music, architecture, language, and material tools and objects.
5   Accounting for the ongoingness of self-moving complements, if not replaces, the academic strategy of finding or concocting place, meaning, and being objectively conclusive.
6   The lives and behaviors of scholars and intellectuals, religious and secular, are, like their subjects, comprised of identity-creating postures, gestures, practices, and skills gained through years of repetition.
7   Concepts are corporeal. Even concepts such as mind, spirit, soul, and gods all are bodied in the quotidian prosthetic experience of perception and identity formation.
8   Repetition is essential to identity formation, gestural naturalization, and skill development.
9   The very ongoingness of moving, it's being in no place, requires the copresence of materiality and virtuality, an incorporeal corporeality.
10 It is moving itself that is the generative source of coherence and valuation and vitality and sense-making and creativity.

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Photography

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On Photography[274]

Writing with Light

The word "photograph" first appeared in a paper read by Sir John Herschel (1792-1871) before the Royal Society on March 14, 1839. It derives from photo- "light" and -graph "something written," thus photography is "writing with light."

As an academic my life has been one of reading and writing, yet over the decades my interest in photography has persistently grown. Primarily I like making images with some interest in the philosophy and history of photography and the appreciation of

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[274] As my interest in the distinctively human capability to identify two things as at once the same (even identical) and not the same at all, I immediately recognized that photography is a notable example. More recently I have seen this human capacity (I call it aesthetic of impossibles) is the complement of the penchant for doubling and mirroring, that is, to split things that are unequivocally whole and unitary into doubles and facets affording further comprehension and appreciation, or, in the negative sphere, to create a threatening doppelganger. There is an identity of a photo and its subject, but the difference in dimension, scale, ontological stuff is astounding. Conjoining my efforts to reflect on this structurality with my developing interest and experience in photography I put together a composite publication, *On Photography* (2020), of a set of short reflective essays and examples of my better images. The following is a selection of these essays. I have edited the essays modestly to correct and update them to be compatible with my present thinking.

photographic art. The combination of instrument and intention and observation expanded to include post processing, computer-based or in darkrooms, has always seemed magical. One uncovers a pinhole in a black box. Light crosses to the back of the box, flipping the world upside down but not side to side, where it is affixed, via chemicals or light-sensitive electronics, as an image. Then that image can be altered and adjusted and printed or projected for viewing. The relentless changes in space and time that characterize the world are defeated in this process as also are its three/four dimensionality in the enduring two-dimensional image that one can endlessly contemplate. Photography performs transformations that are ontological, that is, a shapeshifting across realms of reality itself.

I love writing and describe my experience doing so as akin to that of the alchemist. Writing proceeds from the accumulation of experience living and reading and thinking accompanied by a mounting force that demands liberation as a stream of black squiggles on white paper. It is a stirring swelling emotional process that is a feeling bodied time-consuming process of creating. My word-processing computer serves as an interface. My near unconscious touch of the keys serves the inexplicable flow. Reading what I write I often find myself surprised. "Didn't know I knew that? Where did that come from? Interesting."

There may come a time when my camera is so gesturally naturalized as a prosthetic that I can make images without thinking about settings and technical details, but I'm a long way from that. The camera, to me, is not principally an interface. It is a computer equipped with Artificial Intelligence (AI)—the interface the finger push of the shutter release—that is a profoundly complicated machine-intelligent partner in the creation of an imagined image. My experience making images is different than my experience writing. My experience looking at photos is vastly different from that of reading what I (and others) have written.

This disparity leads me to question the implications of the term photography as "writing with light." Writing is thousands of years old, yet common literacy was enabled only upon Guttenberg's invention around 1439. The history of photography, much shorter, parallels the history of writing. The origin of photography tagged to 1717 yet is more popularly attributed

to Louis Daguerre in the 1820s. Common folk became photographers with the invention of the cheap box camera by Kodak before 1900. Different, both histories revolutionized humanity.

One thing that has attracted me to photography is that I believe it defeats, at least irritates, the language-basis for value, the assumed standard in the West. While it is common to suggest an image "tells a story," to search for a hidden "meaning" in a photo, or to "interpret" an image (to render its significance in words), my inclination is to honor what, for me, distinguishes an image. It is a transduction of a sensory rich time- and space-drenched reality into a two-dimensional, present all-at-once, space-bounded visually accessible enduring material form. It both appears and is visible all at once. It is not written, it is not captured, it is made, created, with intention or not. Photos may illustrate a story. Photos may suggest to a viewer a scenario or story. Photos may document experience. Yet these are supplemental and non-essential rather than substitutional.

My abiding interest is in comprehending and appreciating human distinctive capacities. Certainly, writing is an ancient and remarkable example of a distinctively human trait that gives rise to the externalization of thought and memory and the durability of speech. It is essential to the recording and consideration of history. I suggest that we more fully appreciate photography as serving a distinct, if sometimes parallel, function fundamentally different from language. At core a photo is "of" something in the physical world, thus demanding a comparison, if tacit, of image and subject. As an "image of" at core it is "not" what it "is." Making a photo image halts the ongoingness of, miniatureizes, condenses, and drops the depth dimension of the distinctive nature of the reality of the subject. It forces us to engage in a complex creative encounter involving the viewer of the image, the image itself, and the brute reality that is the subject of the image. This shift, this process, exercises perhaps our most distinctive human faculty, an aesthetics of impossibles. Perhaps "light imagining" or "light image creating" or "light image creative encountering" is preferable to "writing with light"?

Body

Camera obscura, Latin for dark chamber—a pinhole in a surface through which light is projected on to another surface usually

inside a black box—appears in Paleolithic cave paintings. It has a long and continuous history leading to the modern camera. The similarity to body is evident.

Philosopher Brian Massumi opens his 2002 book *Parables for the Virtual*, "When I think of my body and ask what it does to earn that name, two things stand out It *moves*. It *feels*." There is a long history from Plato through Descartes to New Age spirituality of giving short shrift to being bodied. Yet from the moment of birth to our last breath we are undeniably feeling animate bodied organisms. The organic unity that is body is primary as is our self-moving that is synonymous with life itself.

We often project the distinction of our own bodied physicality onto the things we make and encounter. So many things have arms and legs, hands and feet, heads and bodies, faces and backsides, male and female. The world makes sense in terms of the moving feeling anatomy of the human body. Differently bodied we would experience and perceive a different world.

It is commonly understood that we acquire concepts through the abstract nonmaterial mental faculties, hard intellectual effort. Yet Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, and Michel Serres show that concepts, no matter how seemingly abstract, are gained through our experience as self-moving human bodies. Such fundamental conceptual distinctions as in/out, in front/behind, above/below, head/foot, forward/backward, and many more are concepts gained through the experiences of our earliest movings. We are born into the world moving, the action of life itself, and in our most basic bodily gestures and postures we immediately begin, in our first groping gestures, to feel the distinctions that ground all concepts no matter how sophisticated and abstract, even those of advanced theoretical mathematics.

The profundity of Massumi's statement is its insight that bodies are feeling and moving, the locale of experience, perception, knowledge. His courage is in suggesting that moving and feeling, both thoroughly body, have primacy such that even what we understand as mind, soul, spirit, essence are concepts that arise from being a living human body.

The trajectory of my entire academic career has been the increasing concentration on exploring, understanding, and appreciating the human body as an animate organism, that is a

self-moving body. I've paddled against the tide of my peers and the folk, who foreground the primacy of mind and spirit, holding the body as an unfortunately necessary vehicle.

When one begins to take photography seriously the acquisition of equipment becomes complicated. The experience of the acquisition is on the order of an initiation. The foundation of all pieces of photo equipment is the camera *body*. To it are attached the lens (eye) and tripod (feet). In the guts of the body are the unseen, yet critical, parts. The mirrors, the prisms, the film guide or sensor (senses), the film or storage medium (brain), the shutter (eyelids), and the control of the aperture (eye pupil) to begin. Cameras manufactured over the last couple decades—true digital cameras began in the 1980s—are equipped with extraordinarily complex and sophisticated computers (brains). Artificial Intelligence is increasingly sophisticated. Data record-ed for a single image can easily reach one hundred megabytes. Memory cards can store up to multiple terabytes.

Increasingly camera bodies mirror and prosthetically extend and enhance human bodies. As the various camera body compo-nents are named for and correspond with human body parts, the camera body is ergonomically designed to be easily held and operated by human hands (although so far as I know all favor the right hand) and to efficiently interface with human anatomy, principally the eyes and the fingers and thumb.

Human perception has, in recent studies, come to be appreciated as active and agentive, projecting ideals and expectations through the sensory biology to construct as well as to record the external world. Perception is at once subjective and objective, entwined with the distinctively evolved human body architecture. The evolution of camera technology corres-ponds with perception allowing the photographer to create the world as imagined while also recording it objectively. It is remarkable that recent developments in the philosophy of perception—shifting from passive objective recording to subjectively active projection—are operative in the design aims for the development of camera bodies.

The design and the gestural use of camera bodies also replicates those foundational human concepts such as inside/outside and in front/behind. Photography is dependent on the repetitive practice that builds organically based skill. It is also

fascinating that camera technology has increasingly moved toward the creation of the virtual, that is the creation of something that recreates with light and shadows and binary bits in two dimensions the rich fully material three-dimensional world.

Lens

The serious photographer has a selection of lenses (insiders call it "glass"): prime, wide angle, zoom, telephoto, auto-focus, speed (the size of the aperture), weight. The price of a lens correlates with quality, a measure of aberration. Selecting what lenses to purchase, since they are often expensive, is done carefully and with considerable study. Choosing which lens to mount on the camera body for a specific situation requires knowledge and experience. Cost conscious I have settled, for the time being, on three excellent quality lenses that cover the wide variety of photography I like to do. Investment in lenses usually amounts to more than the camera body.

The most fundamental measure of camera lenses is its accuracy of reproduction. While distance, magnification, field, light sensitivity, depth of field are all concerns, accuracy is primary. Computer software that facilitates post processing typically includes the correction for any aberration known for any specific lens.

The primacy of lens quality is inseparable from the fundamental distinction of photography itself. The lens is the mechanism that focuses light emitted or reflected from a chosen subject onto the light sensitive recording surface in the dark camera body. The implication is that what is "out there," our subject, should be accurately replicated "in here," recorded on the camera sensor. Isn't that the whole point of how we value lenses? Certainly, there can be no sense of photography without the presence of the assumption of replication.

Replication is the most fundamental way of distinguishing photography from painting and drawing. Photography is, at base, mechanical/electrical reproduction of some extant real subject that exists independent of its reproduction while painting (drawing) is the human mediated replication or interpretation or invention of any subject that may or may not have an independent counterpart in the non-painted reality.

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It is accurate reproduction that links photography with surveillance and documentation and witness and truth and reality. It supports the automatic fee system of unattended license plate cameras on toll roads. It supported energizing the Black Lives Matter movement following the video recorded murder of George Floyd and the conviction of the cop that murdered him. It is why weddings and graduations and birthdays and other significant occasions are photographed. The resulting photographs are considered equivalent, in some essential sense, to the event itself. Paintings of the same events would be valued quite differently.

Painted portraits and historical paintings such as those of Native Americans painted by George Catlin (1796-1872) are often consulted as representational and documentational. Then consider the photographer Edward Sheriff Curtis (1868-1952) who traveled for years with a huge glass plate camera photographing Native Americans producing a twenty-volume work (1907-1930) containing fifteen hundred photographs printed in large formats and presented in portfolios. Yet it is well known that Curtis posed and costumed his subjects, removing through photo processing any items suggesting civilization, to create highly romanticized concocted images of his subject. Despite the representational objectivity of the lens, we begin to appreciate that from its earliest examples, photography is as subjective as it is objective. Even using the simplest most automatic camera, the photographer has a vast range of possible subjective influences on the resulting photograph. Over the history of photographic technology, the potential for the subjectivity of the photographer to shape the image has become near infinite. I have a 61-megapixel camera and have moderate skill using post processing software. I am overwhelmed by what is possible in shaping and creating images working with digital information built from raw reality. Photography has as much potential, if differently exercised, to be art as has painting.

With my growing experience and knowledge of photography and my persistent reflection on its nature or, to be a bit snooty, its philosophy, I increasingly appreciate that the near universal interest in taking, making, collecting, observing, and displaying images is inseparable from the impossible conjunction that marks its distinction. It is at once, as essential to the lens,

objective true representational documentational, but also, as essential to the human picture maker, utterly personal subjective creative artistic interpretive fabricated. I believe that the inherent interest in photography and images is the feeling kind of knowing that neither aspect of this impossible conjunction can be removed or reconciled with the other. Even more foundational to this feeling is that the power of the photograph proceeds from embracing this impossible. It is true, it is made up. It is objective, it is subjective. It is the real world; it is fabricated artifice. The lens focuses on this magic.

Landscape Photos as Simulacra

I love landscape photographs. I suppose this admission is akin to one who deigns to be a theater sophisticate saying she loves Andrew Lloyd Weber. And I do. On social media I follow several landscape photographers oohing and aahing at their dazzling sensuous images. Where on the planet are these vast pristine gorgeous places? How can anyone have the skills to make such pure images? Most of us have had the experience in an expansive scenic location of feeling awed by the grandeur wanting to save the experience somehow by taking a picture. Yet, our hazy tiny indistinct pictures so often disappoint.

Among all the traits that distinguish photographs, surely the most fundamental is that they show the world seemingly as it is. Simple physics. Light from the world is focused by the camera lens on the film or electronic sensor creating an image. A world replica! Yet, our sad hazy indistinct landscape pictures threaten this most characteristic quality of the photo image. What the hell happened? That's not what I saw. We often blame it on the technology, the camera.

Yet our most basic assumption that photos are true representations of reality should also be threatened by the powerful super detailed, amazingly clear, perfectly lighted and composed images of the accomplished landscape photographer. Should we care to study the process used by professionals, even by advanced hobbyists, to construct the final image, we learn of astonishing camera and post processing computer technologies. The extent of artistically applied alterations includes more than adjusting exposure and contrast, cropping, and straightening. Common are such radical changes as removing powerlines or

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unwanted people, anything distracting. Colors are enhanced, hues are shifted, vibrance and saturation are dialed up or down. Haze is removed with filters or post processing adjustments. Perhaps even the sky is replaced, a sunset added. Dappled light can be splashed on hillsides. Anything imaginable is possible while retaining the illusion distinctive to photography that the image corresponds with, records, the real scene. It does and it does not.

Reflecting on the implications of this maneuvering, we surely begin to appreciate that the pictures that look the most real are often the ones most constructed. For reality to appear real in photos, the image must be extensively built. The image is a simulacrum (the word means image or likeness) made perhaps to match the photographer's memory or ideal of her perceptual and emotional experience. Perhaps these adjustments are needed to overcome technological shortcomings. More profoundly we might imagine that adjustments are necessary because human perception is active and organic and individual and not objective and mechanical, thus not accurately mirrored by the cold objectivity of camera technology. Perhaps the photographer manipulates images to accurately create what she felt, what she experienced.

But then, why stop there? Why not create a simulacrum of what one imagines a pristine Edenic landscape should be? Or once was? Given our common, if tacit and unspoken, presumption that photographs objectively present reality, such constructed photos have great power and serve important social and psychological needs. We do not consider as false what we see in these images. We see the natural world seemingly objectively captured. Isn't that what the camera does? We can't help but see as real what is, if unacknowledged because unaware, a hyperreal landscape. One realer than real. Landscape photographs, it might be argued, have a greater power than landscape paintings in their ability as photos to assure us of the truth and accuracy of our nostalgic, romantic, associations with the natural world. What we hope the natural world to be is evident right there in the photograph. Don't you see?

Particularly at a time when there is vast devastation of the natural world due to industrialization and over-population and overuse and climate change, landscape photographs offer some

respite from our tenuously sequestered guilt. The landscape photo genre amounts, in the terms of French philosopher Jean Baudrillard, to a "precession of simulacra," images that offer a constructed reality that is preferred to, is seemingly more real than, brute reality. Indeed, this simulated reality comes to precede and to serve as the baseline measure for what we experience as real. The photographs present a landscape that is Edenic, that is, of the ideal past but, importantly, also here now, present in its vastness and grandeur. Ahh, see we haven't ruined the planet after all.

Adventures in nature are often planned as an attempt to replicate the experience of a place we have seen in landscape photographs. The places themselves are rebuilt to optimize replication of photos. Vista points, tourist pullouts, photo stops are carefully designated. Lodgings are placed to replicate the photo simulacra that attract visitors. Doubtless what visitors experience of nature is itself created by the preceding images. Ah yes, this is what I came to experience. How beautiful! How pristine! How real! It looks just like the photo!

Field of Vision

Throughout my teaching career I regularly taught courses that explored the distinctiveness of the human senses. I used a variety of activities to give students an experience-based way of appreciating what is quotidian. For example, I asked students to hold at arm's length a pen in front of their face and focus on the tip. Then, starting with their other arm extended out to the side with index finger pointing toward the pen, I asked them to slowly move their finger towards the pen until it is as much in focus as the pen tip. Students were usually surprised that their finger needed to be almost touching the pen tip to be equally in focus.

While our total field of vision is roughly 130° vertically and 160° horizontally, the area of acute focus, called the foveal field, is a cone of but 1°. The small foveal field allows us the exper-ience of making eye contact with a person across a crowded room. I would cast my eyes among students in a large lecture hall asking students to acknowledge when I made eye contact with one of them. We turn toward something that we sense in our peripheral vision so that we might focus on it, see it clearly

and intentionally. Given the tiny foveal field, with binocular vision, that is two eyes looking at the same thing, physics places an object at different angles in each eye (stereopsis). The brain translates slightly different images into depth of field and one's ability to discern distance of an object from the viewer. We also discern distance by relative movement of objects and objects occluding others.

Cameras usually have but a single lens (yet, as I write this, Canon has released "dual fisheye lens" to "create VR," virtual reality) and camera lenses are designed so that the entire field is uniformly in or out of focus. Focus depth is achieved by the size of the aperture or opening through which light passes. Physics assures the smaller the aperture the greater relative depth of focus.

We know all these things intuitively based on our visual experience, yet it is importance to remind ourselves of the difference between the experience of quotidian human vision and that of seeing a photograph. We commonly acknowledge that a photograph captures reality, it replicates what we see. We consider a photo no different from what we visually perceive. Yet, the differences in these visual experiences are on the order of distinct realms of reality.

I have been endlessly interested in trying to understand and appreciate why almost everyone is fascinated by photographs. Every day a billion images are uploaded to the various social media platforms. Since the invention of photography most families have had a photo album or a drawer full of photographs. For years I labeled hundreds of slides and stored them in metal boxes, printing a few for treasured albums, fewer still for framing. Now I have thousands of digital images in the cloud and on my computer, phone, tablet. I still print many.

My hunch is that one reason we love photographs is that they allow us to practice what I feel is most distinctly human, that is, our delight in considering as identical in some sense two things we know are not even in the same realm of reality. A photo is what we see, but then, even as a visual medium, it is seen entirely differently than we see the world that it pictures. There is a ceaseless and unresolvable play between photo and subject. Cameras capture and replicate, but they also transduce (translating something to a totally different medium) and create anew.

As photographers we compose images with clear intent or to lead the eye along a certain path. We adjust depth of field to draw the viewer's attention to certain areas and we blur areas to frame or contextualize. Russian poet and critic Alexi Parshchikov wrote that "the camera chooses the living space for its intended hero by means of the magic ring of the depth of field, which links the functional quantity of the necessary light with the occupation of space. This is the collaboration of field and focusing, their existential parameter."

Photos are identified by their subjects, yet the action of looking at a photo invariably triggers a process of iterative comparison between the subject in its photographed presence and as perceived or imagined in brute reality. Even if we have never seen the actual subject we often remark "that is an amazing (or terrible?) picture of …!" Somehow, we know the subject apart from the photo even if we've never encountered it outside the photo, and we engage the photo in comparison with this knowledge. Talk about fascinating.

Due to physics and human biology, photos engage an inherent playfulness of subject and image, an iterative process of sameness and difference, that enriches perception and imagination. The distinctions and character of a photographed subject are noticed and marked enhancing both subject and photographer/viewer. Photography is as much a way of exploring and knowing as a way of seeing.

Photo Time

In the early 1990s I traveled for five months through Australia, Bali, Java, Thailand, and Nepal. I accumulated several dozen rolls of exposed slide film keeping each in its little plastic cannister. Only after I arrived back home did I get them "developed" so I could see the results, all the while praying that none of them were somehow ruined. At that time photography involved a period of anticipation and excitement, if also the laborious process of dropping off and picking up the film at the photo store. Seeing new pictures was often both exciting and disappointing. Today, of course, digital images appear immediately on the camera display allowing instant assessment and assurance. Still, as quickly as one can look, the image is already of the past.

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Photography has a fascinating relationship to time and memory. Given the incomparable speed of light, even the briefest fraction of a second exposure is sufficient to activate the camera sensor. Photo images allow us to see into time crevasses what the eye otherwise cannot—the crown-shape of tiny droplets bouncing from the splash of a single drop of water, my own five-year-old birthday party, the micro-gesture of emotion on a face, grandma as a child. Photo images, always of the past, engage us as do memories; indeed, we often refer to them as memories.

Memory is not something in the past. Rather memory is present to our experience of something marked as "past." Memories are constructions in the present of what remains yet is ever changing of what we have already experienced. Memory, which is, like it or not, an aspect of all our consciousness, is the presence of what is not present. Memory—consciousness— involves a backward referral in time. All recognition requires having cognized before, thus the prefix re-. Memory requires comparison, if unconsciously so.

There is insight in comparing photographs to memories in that they function somewhat the same, yet with an important difference. Unlike synaptically woven vast networks of raw neuronal ensembles that somehow endure in all their fuzziness, photographs are images with a certain objective stability and permanence. One might imagine that the creative encounter of the past and present in memory is nullified when looking at pictures. Yet, returning to that cigar box of pictures every few years, we invariably see and experience anew the same old photos. Every engagement of even the fixedness of photos at different times is a creative encounter. Each is a fresh and present experience.

The scientific rational understanding of time is based on the laws of thermodynamics, infinitesimal moments, integrals, marching relentlessly from past to future. Time is ceaseless, vectored, and irreversible. Yet humans experience time as both irreversible—taxes and death always come due—and as streams filled with eddies and backflows. Memories and photographs exist only in the presence of a backward referral in time. Impossibly the past and the present, remain distinct, yet they encounter one another creatively. I sometimes call this

impossible the "fat present" to indicate that what we experience of the present must be more than the infinitesimal interval of a fast shutter. It must have duration, if brief, that we might give the past and present, even the future, the opportunity to resound creatively as in a cistern in the chancy organic process of creating emotion and present awareness.

Embracing this time perspective, we must appreciate that the power of a photograph is only realized when it is humanly bodied, that is, engaged in the bodily cauldron of organic processes of perception and consciousness and memory and presence experienced by human beings. An image is not a passive archive of past events so much as an active force that shapes the present and future. We might think of Nietzsche's "eternal return" as apt in describing our encounter with images. I prefer something more like, if less elegant, a "backward-referring forward-flowing creative fat present". Raising fundamental questions of the nature of history, we must contemplate that photo time is not linear, not that of an archive, but rather it is recursive, simultaneous, even fractal.

Given that the photo image is created in bodies—body of photographer, body of camera, body of viewer—it gains vitality in the techniques of body we understand as gesture and skill. Both making and encountering photos change over time as our bodies slowly acquire and hone the gestural skills that reveal depth and complexity and profundity to this complex process that spins about the ever-changing interface of photographic technology. As experience situated in historically culturally located bodies, the whole of one's life experience intertwines in the development of these image related skills. This ongoing development too is interactive, fractal. As we become more adept at making and encountering images, the quality and sensitivity of our lives are enhanced. Embraced by photo time we progressively learn to see and to live richly.

Memento Mori

I am gob smacked by the mercilessness of time's ongoingness, what Susan Sontag referred to in her 1973 book *On Photography* as "time's relentless melt." I don't even know what time is, much less feel I have much power to grasp it. The very notion of grasping is defeated by time's mercuriality. Religions tend to

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account for beginnings and endings. In the beginning God. Off you go time. Really? Time ends with the second coming or apocalypse. Grand stories. Science has its own. Big (compared with what?) Bang (who was listening?) and supernovas (isn't a regular nova quite enough?). Interesting, because they are impossibles, because we buy these stories without seeming to note the obvious. No wonder I feel cuffed in the mouth. Our experience of time moving relentlessly is invariably paired with our awareness of time's cessation, that process seemingly must begin and end: no life without death, no moving without stillness. To experience life's vitality is entwined with, dependent on, stillness and death. The poignancy of Sontag's "time's relentless melt."

In a related insight, Sontag pointed out that photographs are *memento mori*, reminders that we must die. My father lived to age 92. Several years before he died my sisters and I visited him to celebrate his life and our family. And to say goodbye. Part of our time together was spent looking through boxes of old photographs. Dad narrated. Many I hadn't seen. Among them a studio photo of my dad's parents near the time of their marriage. I'd had a wonderful relationship with them, my grandparents. Both died at an advanced age. In my experience, they were always old. Lifting this picture from the box I felt stunned. They were so beautiful and fresh and young right there in that sepia photograph. An instant from a distant past long before my dad was born, a time I couldn't have known them. But I did. There they are. How remarkable that in that picture-moment I was much older than they were. The beauty of their youth emanated the promise of the lives they were yet to live together. I knew, as they then did not, the general course of their lives as farmers with a house full of kids all growing up, marrying, having families, and now all dead, save my dad, himself near his end. The picture of their youth, a frozen instant hidden for decades unseen in a box, was *memento mori* not only of their inevitable deaths, now long ago yet in this photo still far in their future, but also my own as well, too near to avoid feeling a certain sadness of its certainty.

It was perhaps thirty years ago now that my parents came to visit me in Colorado. I took them up Trail Ridge Road in Rocky Mountain National Park where we sauntered across the tundra

high above tree line. As flatlander Kansas dirt farmers, they were thrilled by this seeming alien tundra terrain. I took a photo of them amongst wind-carved craggy rocks with Longs Peak in the background. My favorite picture of them. They look happy and healthy. Now my mother has been dead for over twenty years, my dad dead for over ten. I keep a framed print of that photograph on a bedside table where I see them every day. They are present to me thanks to the photo-magical wrinkling of time. I can't help but feel a connection made possible by this impossibility; they are long gone but they are here still. I much prefer this treasured mountain top photo presence of my parents to the unforgettable glimpse of them casketed, fortunately not memorialized in a photograph. Yet this special mountaintop picture, even in my taking it so long ago, is *memento mori,* a testimony to the certainty of both their deaths and mine.

As something of an advanced hobbyist photographer, I often feel anxiety when engaging in what might loosely be called a photo shoot, though I hate the language. The anxiety is based in feeling a sense of the results I hope for, knowing full well that I must properly prepare and act at the precise appropriate instant. Yet, I feel the same for the whole of life. In a sense it is always now or never. Each moment is singular.

The photographer-camera interface, the connection of human and machine, is the push of the button, the release of the shutter. The cyborgian power engendered is impossible to either the machine or the human alone in that is snips the present, halts the flow, transforms the space, to make immortality, in a sense, yet *memento mori* as well. As touch is a human sense that proclaims both separateness and connection, it seems fitting that this touch of the finger serves as the interface conjoining as also distinguishing the impossibles flow and eternity, life and death.

A power of photography is to stop time's relentless melt seemingly to memorialize, to immortalize, to snatch from the rush of inexorable flow. Yet this trick cannot be severed from the sober reality of the eventual consequence of the ceaseless loss of every present. Barely hidden in the essence of every photograph is the skull. Alas poor Yorick!

Framing

An iconic, if rather romantic and dated, gesture of a photographer is holding the thumb and forefinger of both hands together at arm's length to form a frame. Current photographers sample framings by holding the camera to the eye. Photography invariably involves selection. Selection both includes and excludes. The frame marks the boundary. Focal length of the lens as well as distance from subject are technical limitations on possible framings. When I used slide film, I felt I had to frame the photo as I imagined it in final form before taking the photo. Yet, cropping in post processing can add vast possibilities for framing. The display of a photo print or media post opens even more framing options to both complement the image and to set it apart.

The framing of photographic images does something far more interesting than simply selecting the area of the subject. It creates an ontological shift, a transduction to a different reality realm, that qualitatively constructs the resulting image. Brute reality becomes, under the control of the photographer, art or document. While technically a frame is dimensionless, a boundary line, it does the heavy lifting of distinguishing photo/ non-photo, inside/outside, created/raw. Its presence is what overlays our act of perception with the framing concept "this is a picture of …". It activates the comparative aspect, the double-face, of the creative encounter with a photo, that is the back-and-forth perceptual movement between what is in the photo and what the photo is of. The frame creates an aesthetic of impossibles which at once proclaims what is inside the frame (the picture) is the same as what is outside the frame (real world) while knowing all along, because of the framing, these two are ontologically distinct, image and brute reality. They are of two distinct areas of reality.

The remarkable importance of the frame is commonly honored by substantively expanding its dimensions adding a picture frame to bring greater attention to the transition of what is and is not the picture and to add to the creative elements in the picture. The shape, heaviness, color, ornateness, mat choice, and so many other framing options contribute to how it does so much more than simply holding a picture so it can be displayed.

It sets the tone, focuses the attention, highlights elements, and is another dimension of the artistry of photography.

Image frame might be likened to the proscenium arch that marks theater. Actors strut about the stage, always unrealistic, speaking in stylized theatrical voices words that are not quotidian. Theater exaggerates in a distinctively stylized technique towards the presentation of insight and truth and emotion. Theater presents aspects of life through style and gesture projected through an open third wall. Attending theater requires the embrace of the unreality of the performance to gain access to the insight of the playwright and the actors and theater technicians. The power of theater is in its double-face. In ancient Greek theater, the "sock and buskin [boot]" worn by actors to designate their comedic or tragic characters, came to be depicted in the iconic double-faced comedy-tragedy mask that symbolize theater itself. Theater architecture—stage, set, curtain, proscenium arch, rowed seats, lighting, and enclosed space—functions to engage the double-face distinctive to theater genre. Theater is an interactive encounter.

Viewers of a photo look through the frame into the world created by the photographer or perhaps the image looks out to engage the viewer. Minimally, image framing says, "this is a photo." Like the proscenium arch the framing of images functions to demand a double-faced engagement, that is, the active discourse between the included and excluded, the subject and the presentation, the presence of brute reality and that virtual presence of a made image. The framing marks all that makes photos distinctive—dimensionality, scale, media, style, artifact—and engages complex shifts in perception and gesture in the ongoing comparative activity of encountering photo-graphic images double-faced with their subjects.

Framing photos engages posture and gesture. An image on a smart phone or tablet is framed by the physical limitations of the device. It is accompanied by the common finger-spreading gesture to reframe and resize the image. A photo printed on metal mounted an inch from the wall occupying a large public space engages a remarkably different physical experience. It is accompanied by gestures involving head movement, walking, stepping to differing distances for perspective. By virtue of the

plethora of framing options all photographic images engage gesturally appropriate bodied encounters.

Framing is sometimes compared with a window. We think of seeing an image as like looking through a window onto a reality "out there." Yet the framing of an image does far more than simply limit or direct the view. It creates and interprets and imagines and requires relationships that are physical, aesthetic, and ongoing.

Scale

There are quite a few things I've experienced for years, sometimes decades, that, even when carefully explained to me, simply seem impossible. Flight is one of those. Just yesterday I was looking out the window and saw a bird so ordinary I didn't even think about its species. It was barely moving its wings, yet it was flying rapidly. My thought, "How the hell?" The week before I flew to Los Angeles to visit my granddaughter. More than a hundred of us squashed ourselves into that enormous heavy metal tube and zipped from Denver to LA in less than three hours. I've read about lift and wing design; I might even be able to do the math. Still, I thought, "How the hell?" When I change the lens on my Sony I sometimes glance at the tiny little black shiny sensor and note that it stores 61 times 2^{20} pixels of information. A pixel is a picture (pix) element (el) each of which, for "true color" (24 bit), is independently capable of sensing 2^{24} colors. I best not share my expletive of incredulity. There is the whole world out there in its god-created vastness that can be transduced—the process of shifting or translating from one domain of reality to another—into bajillions of bits of information held on a tiny postage stamp sized sensor that, in turn, can be manipulated every which way from Sunday and then made by another process of transduction into an image as small as a pea or as large as a wall. The image may be tiny compared with its corresponding raw subject—a mountain range on a postcard— or vast—a wall-sized photo of a ladybug. Then since this information is electronic it can be transmitted to and replicated on the moon or the phone of my friend in Norway. Pause please! … Hallelujah! If you don't feel that wonder, you must be dead.

It has commonly been noted that photographic images engage scale. I'd suggest that scale always also implicates boun-

dary. Boundary is essential to scale and to the selection of subject. We can't detect scale apart from boundary. The modern camera technology seems designed to accurately replicate the subject, yet reproduction or replication is not sufficient to describe what photography is about. We might think of photography in terms of mapping. A map with a scale of one-to-one (a perfect reproduction) is of very little use. As Lewis Carroll taught us of such a map in *Alice*, "'It has never been spread out, yet,' said Mein Herr: 'the farmers objected: they said it would cover the whole country, and shut out the sunlight!' So we now use the country itself, as its own map, and I assure you it does nearly as well." Photos are always maps and as we know maps not only play with scale, but they also isolate aspects of the subject such as color or light or contrast or composition of elements or time of year or day. Photos miniaturize or magnify. The frame that marks "this is a photo image" engages the dynamic process of comparison with subject. A photo is at once exactly like its subject and created in terms of a scaled image of the photographer's sense of things. The result of a successful photo is that one learns through this vibrant activity more about oneself and the world.

It is an oddly magnificent human trait that we automatically adjust our encounter with both very large and tiny images to perceive them as identical with their subject. We do the same with mirror images. I suggest that scale wonderment is in our muscles and proprioceptors since, while using entirely different skills and muscles, our signature written in the tiniest space looks the same as if written with spray paint on a wall. Human capacities to scale follow the principle of holding two things—a picture and its subject—to be the same all the while knowing they are not the same at all. The power of a photo is in this scaling magic.

The 1967 Michelangelo Antonioni film "Blow-Up" explored the mystery of scale when a fashion photographer takes some genre shots of a couple in a park. Later upon developing them and enlarging them he notices that he also incidentally recorded a murder. Through several blow-ups including images from various photos as well as increased scale for some images, he locates in the bushes a man with a gun and a body behind a bush. I've frequently had a similar experience if not so dramatic as

discovering a murder. I love to look at newly post processed images on my iPad largely because it has high resolution, but more so because the gesture of spreading my fingers allows me an instant blow-up. I do this commonly simply to assess the technical quality of the image. Is it in sharp focus? Can it be printed in a large format? But I also use this gesture to discover things in images I had no idea were there when I exposed the sensor. I discover the tiny sex organs of a flower, the veins of a leaf, the water droplets of a fountain suspended in air, a lake nested among the ranges of a mountain scene. In a huge pano image of buttes in Monument Valley that I have blown up to 18" x 36" the eye is drawn through the image among the buttes, yet when it is in digital form expanding the image to the size that would fill a wall reveals Navajo hogans and pickup trucks. In the process I come to know a world normally hidden to my eyes. Through scale photos release amazing revelations of new and unknown worlds. My images then become maps to guide me to exciting territories that once known to exist can become subjects to pursue through further creation of images.

Presence

In his 2012 book *Varieties of Presence*, philosopher Alva Noë asks the question "what do you see when you look at a picture?" While he considers looking at a picture a special case of presence, to me he is asking a fundamental question of human perception, "how does what we perceive compare to the thing itself?" Noë's example is "picture of Hillary [Clinton]" about which he notes we acknowledge a certain presence of Hillary when we say of a picture "that's Hillary!" Yet, we also know that this picture of Hillary isn't actually Hillary in the flesh so to speak. How can something be both the presence of Hillary and her absence? Noë sees this impossible as requiring a philosophical resolution.

Rightly refuting the common idea that perception is akin to projecting the world out there on to a screen in our brains, Noë assures us perception is active and constructive not passive and representational. Given this proposition, Noë argues that seeing a picture is a "distinct style of seeing" he calls "pictorial presence." The "double aspect," that is showing up precisely as absent, is, he indicates, a "distinct modality of perceptual con-

sciousness," showing up "precisely—obviously, palpably, mani-festly—not present."

While celebrating this double aspect as a quotidian human superpower, I don't think it is either a distinct modality or one among varieties of presence. From the earliest stages of life, we are shown pictures of things that are almost always not present, yet we identify them as present. We sit with a tot turning the pages of an ABC book pointing to objects in the pictures, "That is an apple." "Look at the bee." "Oh my, there is a cat." We do this activity knowing full well that as the child learns apple, bee, cat, she or he knows full well, without being told, that those pictures are not actually apple, bee, or cat. Amazingly, and with their great delight, kids commonly play like they are interacting with the objects in the picture. I know of no one who attempts or believes it necessary to explain to a two-year-old, "well we say it is an apple, but it isn't really an apple, it is only a picture of an apple." The concept picture comes along with the concepts apple, bee, and cat. All concepts are gesturally bodied—turning pages, pointing, speaking, feigning interaction—and those of pointing and eating and hearing and encountering other than pictures in the world. Humans come ready and delighted with a common attribute of all perception and conception is built on the experience of the simultaneity of presence and absence, semblance and actual. Put differently, presence as absence. Kids don't say pointing at a book, "hey, you just told me that is an apple. Now you ask me to eat this round thing you call an apple. Which is it?" I hold, likely controversially, that this capacity, indeed forte, of presence precisely as absence is distinctly and commonly human among our animal kin.

These perceptual/conceptual human processes involving pictures are fundamental to the early mastery of such indeter-minate categorical concepts as identifying the letter "A" or "a" among endless styles and presences, but also much more complicated concepts such as color, not even a thing in itself, but a quale of things. Most tiny kids are fully happy with "kind of red" or "red-ish." How remarkably complex, yet utterly banal to humans, are these faculties.

This discussion of presence and its utter ordinariness for humans offers insight into the common fascination with and delight by photo images. Photos are distinguished by being a

presence precisely as absent. Because of the presumption of the one-to-one relationship between image and subject, photos push the experience of presence precisely as absent to its limit. Identifying something as being what we clearly know it is not, a photo does not evoke intense anxiety, rather photo images delight and inspire. They do so at least in part because they exercise one of the core experiences fundamental to acquiring perceptual skill and knowledge from our earliest stages in life. While seemingly adults need things to be rational, explained, meaningful, lawful, resolved of conflict, and non-repetitive, I suggest that it is fundamental to human nature to relish the energy and power that comes from practicing the play of impossibles that pervades our lives. Photo presence as absence is, in the modern technological world, one of our most enjoyable playgrounds. Photos require the practice of a skill of a presence that is also an absence that allows us to transcend what we know to acquire new experience and knowledge.

The infinite potential of creating photo images and looking at them is like playing improvisational riffs in a jazz band whose music constitutes our humanity. This repetition of making and accumulating photos is the enjoyable practice required to acquire and hone the skill we know as being human.

Bit Reality

Digital technology came to photography alongside digital music recordings. It was an ontological shift from analog to digital, from film to memory card, from vinyl to tape. This shift was global. My first books were written on a typewriter with me pushing a key to mechanically produce a character on paper. Cut and paste were literal. The shift correlated with the rise of digital computing and internet technology. My first post undergraduate job, 1967, was the installation of computers in an international corporation as the basis for their accounting system and increasingly to support making business decisions. The punch cards that served as input/output to the computer converted analog to digital (zeros and ones), an essential step for trans-mission of information via the internet and, eventually, its storage in what we now familiarly call the cloud.

The history of photography tracks with and plays a major role in the recent history of information technology. There are

of course correlations between the pre and post digital eras in photography. We have hints with such things as the nod to darkroom photo processing by the naming of a prime digital post processing software Lightroom. The sound of the mechanical camera shutter is simulated. Rapidly the material and objective world came to be transduced into digital code, into information, that could be electronically stored and transmitted wherever. It was an ontological shift from the directly perceiveable reality to a virtual Bit (binary digit) Reality. The results amounted to a radical shift in the way we understand and experience ourselves and reality. It birthed the information age where digital reality has become practically the whole of social reality as well as our prime interface with the technologically pervasive material reality.

In a classic 1935 essay, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," German philosopher Walter Benjamin (1892-1940) focused on the reproducibility of film, foreshadowing the later much more radical shift to Bit Reality. He wondered about the experience of something being original, as a painting, compared with a copy or a forgery. Can one have an original or a forgery in mechanically reproducible art? What happens to what he called the aura of being in the presence of an original. French philosopher Jean Baudrillard (1929-2007) suggested that images of reality tend to overwhelm reality itself creating something of a hyperreality. We all experience this supplanting in our lives as even our bodies become sets of metrics collected on wearable technologies and phone cameras stored on our cloud connected smart phones. We constantly consult this Bit Reality to assure ourselves that we exist and who it is we are. Selfie Reality.

I hold out for photography to persist in a way that exercises our human distinctiveness. Certainly, while digital images might be created *ex nihilo*—the exponential expansion of AI in concocting images is remarkable—photographs continue to require an independent objectively real subject, even a material subject if sometimes subtle. Photography produces images that exist only to the extent they are humanly perceivable. We might gain insight by reminding ourselves that digit, as in binary digital, means both whole numbers and human fingers and thumbs. I suggest that it was the evolution of the human hand with fingers

and opposable thumb numbering five digits that correlated with acquiring upright posture and increased brain size and complexity that gave rise to all our human distinctions. Although the most undefined of senses, touching and moving—distinct yet almost synonymous—are essential to all perception and conception. The hand is the foundation of such fundamental ideas as "grasping" which means both holding by the opposition of fingers and thumb and comprehending intellectually. These distinct graspings are biologically interdependent.

As we grasp the body of the camera, adjust the settings with dials requiring fingers and thumbs, and use sensitive finger touch to activate the shutter, we reenact the history of human evolution. We also engage high levels of intuition grounded in experience and accumulated skill to control with our digits the AI-assisted software that is a creative encounter with digital information to produce an imagined perceivable object, a photo. The implications of human touching and moving never disengage notwithstanding the visual prominence of photographs, because the images of photography, while mechanically/ electronically reproducible, are always humanly imagined and created. Looking—the active intentional act of seeing—at a photograph is an act of grasping, of touching and being touched, of moving and being moved.

The ongoing exponentially expanding explosion of photography and photographs in the recent information age gives rise to complex philosophical questions of aura and the overwhelm of hyperreality, of creativity and originality. These concerns are only exacerbated with the explosion of AI produced photos. Yet it also confirms the utterly fundamental moving touching digit foundation of the exercise of human creativity and distinctive capabilities.

Skill

From early in life, we learn that gaining acumen, acquiring, and honing skill requires practice, that is, purposeful repetitive action usually under critical guidance. "Practice piano before you go out to play!" "Remember to bring your helmet to football practice." "Yoga is my religious practice." The ten-thousand-hour practice rule for mastery of any skill popularized by Malcolm Gladwell focuses on the importance of supervised high

repetition. We've all experienced it. I appreciate the synonymy of practice with play common especially to music and sports. To play music or sports shifts attention from some specified end or goal to the enjoyment of the ongoing repetitive process. The constant ongoing play or practice is autotelic, the goal itself. When practice becomes self-satisfying, we tend to identify with the activity. "I'm a basketball player." "I'm a dancer." "I'm a yogi." "I'm a photographer."

To focus on practicing shifts the attention to moving bodies. Even to practice thinking—which we might imagine as abstract intellection—requires such bodied actions as writing or conversing. Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) in 1936 wrote an essay "Techniques of Body" showing how habit and gesture—body techniques—are fundamental to individual and social identity. We construct and express ourselves by practicing gesture. Some philosophers, for me especially Maxine Sheets-Johnstone, convincingly show that we acquire even the most abstract concepts by means of our moving bodies. Such foundational concepts as in/out, above/below, in front/behind, before/after are all based in the experience of being a distinctively human body. Gesturing moving bodies (bodies at practice) are foundational to all metaphors which, as George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have convinced us, are at the core of all language and the associated acquisition of knowledge.

In my religion studies, I have increasingly shifted to foreground the moving gesturing body as establishing the felt sense of coherence or fit, always playing against the threat of incoherence or chaos, as a preferred way to understand and assess much of religious life, much preferred to asking, "what does that mean?" The shift is significant in foregrounding and focusing on self-moving bodies rather than on abstract intellectual ideas. Nullified is the Cartesian cogito "I think therefore I am" that undergirds our disastrous habit of separating what we refer to as body and mind. The remarkably complex, yet whole, animate organism is so obviously more fundamental than some core division that must from the start be reconciled or interrelated. As in playing music or sports or taking photos, the bodily feeling of the practice itself confirms the pleasure of being a self-moving body.

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I recently wanted to memorialize an event at a restaurant and got out my phone to take a group selfie. My guests had to guide me to switch to the selfie view. I couldn't seem to hold the phone to include everyone. Then I couldn't seem to get a digit on the button. I finally gave up and someone else took the group selfie and sent me a copy. When later I looked at what I had done I discovered I even had it on video. I rarely take a selfie; I have no practice. My kids and grandkids take selfies constantly and can take a dozen while I'm trying to find my phone.

Especially with the growing ubiquity of phone cameras including front-facing lenses over the last ten years, a huge segment of the global population has quickly engaged the gestural practice of taking photos of nearly everything. The smartphone camera has become prosthetic, a cyborgian enhancement of our bodies. While there are plenty of photographers who trudge about carrying heavy complex expensive photo gear taking thousands of photos in a studied and purposeful practice—I consider myself a parttime one— photography for the majority population has shifted from a way of seeing to a way of being in the world. The continual practice of the complex and specialized gestures of taking pictures, in-phone editing them, and posting them immediately to social media and cloud storage have made many, especially the young, adept creative photographers.

Our constant practice as photographers has significantly changed us—even at the very level of neuron, synapse, and tissue—as also the very fabric of the world, the reality, we experience. The way we interact with much in the world is shaped by our photo practice. As metahuman photo-making cyborgs we move about the world constantly discerning what might be photographed and we interact with others by means of photo exchange and circulation. Some have begun to wonder if this practice amounts to a bad habit.

The overwhelming and ubiquitous power of media platforms like Facebook, recently acknowledged as capable of evil as well as good, is a manifestation of the recent shift in how we practice photography. This power fundamentally resides in the gesturing moving bodies of practicing photographers.

Shoot

As a kid, I was the son of a dirt farmer living in a tiny village in southeastern Kansas. My parents would occasionally drive the few miles to Baxter Springs to visit my mother's uncle and aunt, Walter and Cora Grantham. Rather than a dreary day with stodgy old folks, these were for me exciting occasions. Uncle Walt somehow had accumulated considerable wealth and he and Aunt Cora traveled the world. Rather than bringing back photos of their travels—I don't recall any yet likely they had many— they brought back the world itself, or tokens of it: an actual elephant's foot umbrella stand, huge fan-backed chairs, game tables inlaid with unusual woods and shells, a vast set of Grantham Royal Doulton china that I currently have, and endless items of exotica. Yet in their front hallway next to the stairs, they also had tall stacks of *National Geographic* magazines that, after perusing all the artifacts, I could settle in and look through all afternoon. This magazine has always been known for its remarkable photographs of exotic subjects. An afternoon engrossed in these magazines was like travelling the farthest and most mysterious corners of the globe. The magazine photos brought to life the peoples and cultures my relatives had visited far more than did the trophy items they had shipped home, yet this magazine among others introduced photo tourism, often the photo intrusion into the exotic.

Susan Sontag perhaps shocks with her statement, "There is an aggression implicit in every use of the camera." Isn't aggression implicated in the most common photographic terminology? We do a phot shoot. We aim, take, target, shoot, grab, capture pictures. There is an often-unspoken aggressiveness in taking pictures. We want to take and possess photos of everything, and we want our visages and actions to be captured and shot at every possible moment. The language of photography embraces a sense of aggression, invasion, virtual or simulated violence. Our captured photos become hostages of social media platforms on display for all who wander through the space. We are offended when they receive too few likes. Privacy, and its implied safety, has become so old fashioned.

Do we not accept aggression by wanting to be captured and publicly displayed? Once this aggression occurs, the social effect of accumulating likes encourages an escalation, a diminishment

of privacy, a thrill of being judgmental as well as the subject of hostility. Photo capture breeds outrageous behavior done for cameras. It normalizes and publicly circulates stunts, bullying, rudeness, revenge, and nudz.

We thrive on the thrill of photo aggression. Paparazzi pester the rich and famous seeking photos of their private lives. We pay for reproductions of their aggressive actions that we might catch a glimpse of our idols unaware. Images that idealize subjects—models, famous, wealthy, popular, the infamous as well—are implicitly aggressive. So also, if unacknowledged, are the more banal photos such as class pictures and mug shots. Do they not, by the attention, the implied specialness, that accompanies them suggest that if similar photos of me are shot, displayed, and liked that I too am interesting and attractive? Maybe even a bit famous? Images on social media can be dangerous and powerful forces for compliance, revenge, punishment.

It is a common view that people in some cultures—especially those we often, by whatever euphemism, consider primitive—believe that to have their photo taken is a theft of their soul. Despite the primitivist bias of this statement I have spent considerable time among many folks in small scale tribal cultures and, while I've never heard any one of them express this adage, many see photography as an aggressive act. They often prohibit cameras and confiscate and destroy photos.

Photography is foundational to the surveillance culture of many cities. Crimes and criminals are caught on camera. While photos always interpret rather than objectively capture reality, surveillance photos stand up as evidence in court. Surveillance is an aggressive use of photography, often violating privacy, justified by lawful intent.

In contemporary society with the ever-increasing concern for the preservation of threatened nature and animals, particularly those we consider wild and exotic, cameras substitute for rifles in the growing popularity of photo safaris. Rather than bringing home a stuffed head to mount on the wall, one hangs enlarged photos of exotic places and animals. Cameras offer the semblance of danger and violence.

Sontag captures the double-face of the aggressive aspect of photography writing the "very passivity—and ubiquity—of the

photographic record is photography's 'message,' its aggression." Her insight is that even the most innocent and common snapshot carries the message of implicit aggression as evident also in the extensive terminology associated with photography. The excitement and even fear we so often experience being photographed and looking at pictures are likely inseparable from the thrill accompanying its aggressiveness.

Art

I'm enthralled by landscape photography. It connects me with the grandeur of nature and deepens my experience in naturescapes. These images are located at the perfect places and times when light and weather and season are dramatic and special. They inspire imagination, inspiration, attraction, awe. They are shamelessly romantic and nostalgic. I attribute their power, in part, to the exotic and pristine places accessed by professionals with the time and means to travel and to await the perfect moment. Yet ordinary subjects—a lone tree on a hill, an old rowboat on a glassy lake, a green hillside with white sheep— can be as stunning. The quality and impact of these images contrast markedly with the muted, monochrome, hazy, uninteresting results common to my own efforts at pointing a camera at vast landscapes. Every aspiring photographer asks, "What makes these images so good?"

At the near opposite end of the photography spectrum, I'm equally interested in portraits and headshots. These are done either in studios with extensive control of background and lighting or in natural environments often supplemented with lighting and other clever ways of controlling the outcome. Some faces, some people, are beautiful or interesting, yet a good photographer can make stunning pictures of any subject. Again, "What makes these images good?"

What we feel as good or beautiful or powerful is strongly subjective, yet there are some aspects of photographs that gain wide agreement as to their high quality. Appreciating how a photographer, as technician, shapes the "raw" subject to create an imagined photo coincides with the question of whether photography is art. I think this issue naïve at the outset. It arises due only to the misguided assumptions that a photo is a perfect replication of reality and that cameras operate mostly indepen-

dent of the photographer. This understanding of photography assumes the camera's, rather than the camera-mediated photographer's, relationship with subject is near total. To complement a photo of mine, I've had people say to me, "You must have a good camera!" The hardware and software are assumed to operate nearly independent of the photographer who merely pushes a button. To even ask the question "is photography art?" is based on naïve assumptions about photography, and perhaps some about art as well. If I draw a crude picture in an "art class" is that any more art than taking an out-of-focus shot of a barn door in a "photography class"? Seems the principal difference between these genres has to do with materials, tools, and techniques. Perhaps a discussion of craft versus art could be engaged, yet I find it uninteresting when the concern is creativity and quality.

What makes a good photo? What makes a photograph a work of art? These are questions shared with any creative medium or genre. Both technique and aesthetics are relevant, separable yet entwined. As an aspiring photographer I watch many a video featuring accomplished landscape and portrait photographers who describe how they make remarkable images. Some focus on equipment, technique, settings, workflow while others focus on composition and aesthetics. There are many rules of thumb for landscape composition: the rule of thirds; a spiral based on the famed Fibonacci Sequence to guide the movement of the eye; complementing a vast landscape with an interesting foreground; blue and golden hours for favorable lighting; and that the image should tell a story. Technical rules abound such as exposure, lens choice. For portraits, understanding the endless choices of lighting and backgrounds is essential to achieving specific styles and feeling of images with a wide range of uses from classical portraiture to edgy commercial advertising images to soft romantic personal pictures to families celebrating a special occasion to career appropriate professional headshots. The technical discussions specific to portrait and landscape photography are unending, two among many genres of photography. Added to these considerations are the endless techniques in post processing from software choices to workflow and specific techniques.

A photo integrates many things: the subject as imagined, the level of technical and aesthetic skill mastery, the capabilities and characteristics of the camera and lens, the command of post processing applications, and the life experience of the photographer. The image also engages the history, experience, and personality of the viewer. Technical skill is essential. Aesthetic sensibility and vision are essential. Practice, skill, interest, experience, and paying attention over considerable time also shape taste and hone discernment. There are no shortcuts. Loving to make and view pictures and to understand what is involved in making the images that you and your community of trusted colleagues consider good are not only self-satisfying, but they also produce results. To make or see a good picture is an enormous pleasure. It is photo arting and art.

Human Distinctiveness

26

To Risk Meaning Nothing
Charles Sanders Peirce and the Logic of Discovery[275]

Approaching age seventy, suffering both severe poverty and painful illness, Charles Sanders Peirce—mathematician, logician, philosopher, one of America's greatest minds—kept on writing including an essay with the curious title "A Neglected Argument for the Reality of God." Unlike the bulk of his voluminous writings, which was first published only decades after his death, this essay was written for publication in *Hibbert's Journal* and Peirce repeatedly expressed frustration at the length limitations the journal gave him. Still in twenty-two published pages Peirce not only summarized and updated many of the central elements of his expansive semiotic program, he introduced new and novel topics, among them notably what he termed "musement." Here, as in all his works, Peirce's writing is sometimes frustratingly opaque, yet not without occasional passages of poetic eloquence. Perhaps more than clear exposition, this essay invites musement.

Peirce begins the essay with a series of definitional clarifications—God, idea, real, actual, experience, argument, argumentation (all together handled in a couple of paragraphs)—before entering a discussion of musement, which he alternatively terms "Pure Play." Musement, Peirce argues, understood as a purposeless though lively communication in odd half hours between self and self leads eventually and inevitably to the idea of God"s reality. "In the Pure Play of Musement the idea of God's Reality will be sure sooner or later to be found an attractive fancy, which

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275 In my *Creative Encounters* (2019) 197-226.

the Muser will develop in various ways." (6.465)[276] Peirce understands the idea of God's reality to be an operative hypothesis which shapes conduct in accordance with a state of mind he calls "believing." Entwined with a discussion of the three-stage process of inquiry as well as the principles that distinguish "pragmatism" Peirce refines, extends, and expounds his argument for God's reality.

Though the essay appears to center on a theological issue, it serves as a culminating discussion to Peirce's life-long endeavor to understand the various processes of inference (the core of his semiotic) and as an expansion of this discussion of musement, a kind of play. This essay is, to my knowledge, Peirce's only explicit discussion of play, yet his understanding of play is traceable to one of the first books of philosophy he ever read, Friedrich Schillers' *Aesthetic Letters* (1795).

Appealing to common knowledge, Peirce wrote: "Play, we all know, is a lively exercise of one's powers" (6.458). Of play, Peirce acknowledges a pure form, a Pure Play, Musement, described as "a certain agreeable occupation of mind." "Indulged in moderately—say through some five to six percent of one's waking time, perhaps during a stroll—it is refreshing enough more than to repay the expenditure." Musement "involves no purpose save that of casting aside all serious purpose." "It bloweth where it listeth." "It has no purpose, unless recreation." If purpose enters the process it becomes science, which Peirce understands as inappropriate to concerns about "the truth of religion" (6.458).

To the determined practitioner of musement Peirce provides eloquent advice.

> The dawn and the gloaming most invite one to Musement; but I have found no watch of the nychthemeron that has not its own advantages for the pursuit. It begins passively enough with drinking in the impression of some nook in one of the three Universes. But impression soon passes into attentive observation, observation into mus-

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[276]According to convention, references to Peirce's works will be given by volume and paragraph numbers from Charles Sanders Peirce, *Collected Papers*, vols. 1-6 ed. C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss; vols. 7-8 ed. A. W. Burks, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931-1958).

ing, musing into a lively give and take of communication between self and self. ... Adhere to the one ordinance of Play, the law of liberty. I can testify that the last half century, at least, has never lacked tribes of Sir Oracles, colporting brocards to bar off one or another roadway of inquiry; and a Rabelais would be needed to bring out all the fun that has been packed in their airs of infallibility. ... those problems that at first blush appear utterly insoluble receive, ... their smoothly-fitting keys. This particularly adapts them to the Play of Musement (6.459-6.460).

The three universes of experience to which Peirce refers, summarized in "The Neglected Argument" (see also 4.545ff), are basic to his program. The first universe comprises all "mere Ideas, those airy nothings to which the mind of poet, pure mathematician, or another might give local habitation and a name within that mind." Peirce specifies the second universe as "the Brute Actuality of things and facts." The third universe includes everything "whose being consists in active power to establish connections between different objects, especially between objects in different Universes." This is the universe of the sign, which has its being in its power to mediate between its object and the mind (6.455). In these terms, musement at least begins with a "drinking in the impression of some nook of one of the three Universes."

In musement no kind of reasoning is to be discouraged. In particular musement should not be constrained to "a method of such moderate fertility as logical analysis" (6.461). Peirce concludes his encouragement. "Enter your skiff of Musement, push off into the lake of thought, and leave the breath of heaven to swell within you, and open conversation with yourself; for such is all meditation" (6.461).

Once in this lake of thought Peirce expects the skiff of musement to take a course running inevitably toward the hypothesis of God's reality. One begins perhaps with the interest in the nature of one's feelings, with the faculties to experience pain and pleasure. In time this course will lead to metaphysical interests, to universe-wide phenomena only partly experienced and still unformulated. These, Peirce recommends, should be pondered from every point of view, an effort sustained until

some truth beneath the phenomena seems to arise. During this course one will begin to appreciate the unspeakable variety in one or another of the three universes of Peirce's conception, but in time musement on the variety will turn to connections and homogeneities, not only within one or another of the three Universes, but among them as well. Peirce discusses, as an example of one of these homogeneities "growth" which occurs among the phenomena of all the universes. The course of this skiff of musement is that of increasing inclusiveness and general-ization. A reduction of the manifold to unity. Such a process Peirce argues is bound eventually to raise the hypothesis of the reality of God (6.462-465).[277]

This process leads to the composition of a nest of three arguments, which Peirce sometimes collectively calls the "Neglected Argument." He also refers to it as the "Humble Argument" perhaps the more accurate and useful designation, for it is open, in Peirce's terms, "to every honest man, which I surmise to have made more worshippers of God than any other" (6.482). It is a "neglected argument" only in that Peirce believed it to be known, but ignored, by theologians. It is an argument not unknown to anyone and Peirce even holds that it is most forceful "in the form it takes in the mind of the clodhopper" (6.483). From a third perspective the argument bears upon what

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[277]There is a comparison to be made between Peirce's discussion of the hypothesis of God's reality and Jacques Derrida's discussion of the loss of center. Derrida calls attention to an event, a rupture, in the history of the concept of structure. This rupture is the realization that while center gives structure orientation, balance, and organization, it restricts its play. The rupture occurs as one begins to think of center as an attribute of structure, leading one "to begin to think that there was no center, that the center could not be thought in the form of a being-present, that the center had no natural locus, that it was not a fixed locus but a function, a sort of non-locus in which an infinite number of sign-substitutions came into play" (Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play" 294). Though Peirce's discussion here appears to posit the being-presence of God, the unity of all, the *ens necessarium*, it is essential that we see that he posits the hypothesis of God's reality and that he leaves open the possibility that the humble argument might lead to hypotheses adorned in various terms. While I believe that Peirce's ideas are often as radically insightful as Derrida's, they are sometimes obscured by the language of the era in which he wrote.

Peirce terms "methodeutics," that is, on the principles of argumentation and inevitably on what he understood as "pragmatacism."[278]

Peirce held the argument for God's reality to be nothing other than an example of the "first stage of a scientific inquiry into the origin of the three Universes" (6.485). He saw an identity between the maxim of his pragmatism and what, by this point of development in his thought, he understood as the first stage in the process of inquiry (variously termed "abduction," "retroduction," and "hypothetic inference"). In identifying musement as an instance of "abduction," Peirce made a connection between play and the maxim of pragmatism.

Play, as Peirce argued, at least in its form that he called Pure Play or Musement, leads eventually and inevitably to a grand hypothesis of unity, the *ens necessarium* to which Peirce gave the Christian/American alias "God." In this discussion, there is a fascinating implication that play and that most creative stage of inquiry Peirce called abduction can both be more fully understood when conjoined.

Throughout his life, Peirce turned again and again to contemplate the nature of inference. Just how is it that knowledge is gained? From whence cometh hypotheses? What is the logic of discovery? His continuing analysis of induction and deduction convinced him that these forms of inference do not "contribute the smallest positive item to the final conclusion of inquiry" (6.475 see also 5.171). He proposed a third mode of inference, surely one of his greatest contributions, which he called by various names: abduction, retroduction, and hypothesis (or hypothetic inference). Late in his life this mode had come to be understood as the first of three stages in the process of

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[278]Though the philosophical movement Peirce initiated is most commonly called "pragmatism," not "pragmatacism," and that term was first used by Peirce, he later used the term pragmatacism in reaction to the interpretations given the former term by Ferdinand Schiller and William James. In shifting to the new term he wrote: "So then, the writer, finding his bantling 'pragmatism' so promoted, feels that it is time to kiss his child good-by and relinquish it to its higher destiny; while to serve the precise purpose of expressing the original definition, he begs to announce the birth of the word 'pragmatacism,' which is ugly enough to be safe from kidnappers" (5.414).

inquiry.[279] It focused on the logic of discovery, on the creation and acceptance of hypotheses. In "A Neglected Argument" Peirce described the creation of hypotheses in these terms:

Every inquiry whatsoever takes its rise in the observation, in one or another of the three Universes, of some surprising phenomenon, some experience which either disappoints an expectation, or breaks in upon some habit of expectation of the *inquisiturus*; and each apparent exception to this rule only confirms it. There are obvious distinctions between the objects of surprise in different cases; but throughout this slight sketch of inquiry such details will be unnoticed, especially since it is upon such that the logic-books descant. The inquiry begins with pondering these phenomena in all their aspects, in the search of some point of view whence the wonder shall be resolved. At length a conjecture arises that furnishes a possible Explanation, by which I mean a syllogism exhibiting the surprising fact as necessarily consequent upon the circumstances of its occurrence together with the truth of the credible conjecture, as premises. On account of this Explanation, the inquirer is led to regard his conjecture, or hypothesis, with favor (6.469).

Elsewhere Peirce presented this first stage of inquiry in syllogistic form:

The surprising fact, C, is observed;

But if A were true, C would be a matter of course,

Hence, there is reason to suspect that A is true (5.189).

Only the first stage of inquiry gives rise to hypothesis. It does not establish anything (it "does not give security," as Peirce would say); this is the work of induction and deduction.

Deduction, of which Peirce held a traditional understanding, collects through logical explication the consequence of a hypothesis. It formulates the implications a hypothesis ought to have considering experience. Induction follows as the final stage of inquiry to ascertain how far these logical consequence accord with experience. It examines experience, which is never exhaust-

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[279]For the sorting out of the history of Peirce's conceptions on inference, see K. T. Fann, *Peirce's Theory of Abduction* (The Hague: Maartinus Nijhoff, 1970).

tive or totally representative of the domain of the hypothetic implications, in light of expectation and draws general conclusions. Deduction explicates, induction evaluates. Only abduction creates any real advancement in human knowledge (see 5.171 and 6.475).

Striking at the heart of philosophical systems that rest on and proceed from first principles or ultimate goals, Peirce established a philosophy with a particularly modern character. Peirce's pragmatism (synonymous with abduction) founds inquiry on a process that begins with the introduction of a "may be" emerging from a background that is always to a degree tacit and promised continued improvement through criticism. Still, there is no final truth or conclusion.

Peirce's conception of abduction can be more fully appreciated in light of his critique of Cartesianism which he advanced as four denials. Read positively they present key elements of his pragmatism.

1. We have no power of Introspection, but all knowledge of the internal world is derived by hypothetical reasoning from our knowledge of external facts.
2. We have no power of Intuition, but every cognition is determined logically by previous cognition.
3. We have no power of thinking without signs.
4. We have no conception of the absolutely incognizable (5.265).

Beginning with the general policy—a method of doubt—that nothing can be accepted as true that is subject to any doubt, Descartes turned to introspection. He doubted everything until he at last found that which is, for him, beyond doubt, "I think, therefore I am." It is upon this method of doubt that the Cartesian system is built. It owes much to the Scholasticism it sought to replace, most significantly the idea that the acquisition and development of knowledge must rest on some unquestioned, undoubtable *a priori*. Whereas the schoolmen proceeded on the authority of God revealed through the testimony of the church, Descartes's system proceeded on a method of doubt, which, through introspection, led him to that indubitable first principle.

Peirce denied that we have the power of introspection, the ability to get at the truth independent of external conditioning;

body has primacy. This position is a direct consequence of his maxim of pragmatism and a declaration that the scope of the maxim extends to knowledge of the internal as well as the external world.

Peirce also objected to the foundation of inquiry, of science, being dependent upon individual self-consciousness. Individuals cannot be the sole judges of truth. His maxim of pragmatism pushed toward inquiry proceeding in public among a community of inquirers. Only in this way is knowledge subject to criticism and refinement.

The second denial, that of intuition, is effectively a denial of the Cartesian method of skepticism. Descartes's system must rest on intuition, which by definition is a rationally justified, but unconditioned, premise. While Descartes thought this could be accomplished by clearing the mind of prejudice as an act of the will, Peirce held this to be impossible. Every cognition is logically determined by previous cognition. There is for Peirce always a background. Much of that background is always tacit as has so effectively been shown by Michael Polanyi[280] and George Lakoff and Mark Johnson,[281] and for this reason among others we cannot clear our minds of prejudice; there can be no intuit-tion, all knowledge is personal.

Descartes replaced the testimony of authority of Scholasticism with reason, but both sought to found knowledge on unquestionable first principles. Peirce's critique is that there is no absolutely first premise. All knowledge is won in the never-ending posing, criticizing, and testing of hypotheses.

Peirce understood hypothesis to pertain only to the domain of "intellectual concepts" (5.467). In the terms of his three universes, this cannot take place without signs, they comprise the third universe. Hypotheses, as is all thought, are sign constructions. The universes of brute actuality and ideas are known by the mediation of signs. There is no unmediated access to outside reality. This is Peirce's position on the body-mind

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[280]Michael Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1966) and *Personal Knowledge: Toward a Post-Critical Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).
[281]George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999).

problem bequeathed to us by Descartes among others. Even all observations, what we consider facts, form themselves only in relationship to background and in terms of signs. Peirce's semiotic is itself a critique of Cartesianism's position on the body. By beginning with "I think, therefore I am," one identifies oneself only with thought, with mind. The mind and the body are of separate natures, distinct and can exist separately (not that they do).

The fourth denial follows directly. Cognition proceeds from hypothesis; hypothesis emerges from a field of inquiry. Thus "over against any cognition there is an unknown but knowable reality; but over against all possible cognition, there is only the self-contradictory. In short, cognizability (in its widest sense) and being are not merely metaphysically the same, but are synonymous terms" (5.257).

Cartesianism is caught in the distinction between the inventions of thought and the particular realities these thought inventions represent. By holding that the Cartesian method only applies to the inventions of thought and that the medium of thought is separate from reality, then thought can never grasp what is real. Yet the Cartesian claim to know particular realities immediately forces the conclusion that we conceive what is incognizable. Peirce not only showed the nonsense of this position (to identify something as incognizable already requires its cognition in some sense), but also established his semiotic as the solution.

Yet, by proposing a hypothesis for the reality of God, is not Peirce simply returning to the position of Scholasticism, which rested, as Peirce put it, "on the testimony of the sages and of the Catholic Church" (5.264)? The important distinction is that Peirce argues that musement leads inevitably to the hypothesis of God's reality. The reality of God is not proposed to be the unquestioned premise underlying all inquiry. Peirce held that "the function of hypothesis is to substitute for a great series of predicates forming no unity in themselves, a single one (or small number) which involves them all, together (perhaps) with an indefinite number of others. It is, therefore, also a reduction of a manifold to unity" (5.276).

The hypothesis of God's reality is but a version of the most global possible hypothesis, that is, the hypothesis that reduces

the manifold to unity. It is simply a dressing of the idea of unity and universality in particular Western and Christian theological attire. As hypothesis, a "may be," it serves to affect human actions, but the notable difference is that in Peirce's construction, God's reality is hypothetic, a "may be" or a "may be not," and therefore remains open and vital, rather than being a statement of accepted conviction, a certainty proclaimed in the past.

Abduction is inseparable from Peirce's understanding of pragmatism as he so often indicated. Peirce described pragmatism in the simple terms as concern with "the admissibility of hypotheses to the rank of hypotheses," the "explanations of phenomena held as hopeful suggestions," that is, "pragmatism … is nothing else than the question of the logic of abduction" (5.196). The maxim of pragmatism amounts to a criterion of meaning. A hypothesis only has meaning if it has empirical or practical consequences. The total of these possible consequences constitutes its meaning. But this must not be confused with some crass pragmatism of efficiency, for it simply means that a hypothesis must be subject to test by experimentation. "Pragmatism … makes conception reach far beyond the practical. It allows any flight of imagination, provided this imagination ultimately alights upon a possible practical effect" (5.196. See also 5.13n1, 5.412, 5.464).[282]

Furthermore, meaning is essentially always open to revision and development. "Consider what effects, that might conceivably have practical bearings, we conceive the object of our conception to have. Then, our conception of these effects is the whole of our conception of the object" (5.402).

The hypothesis that holds up through repeated testing may come to be associated with a high degree of confidence in its ability to render clarity, yet the conceivable practical effects of a conception always remain virtually open. "This leaves the hypothesis but one way of understanding itself; namely, as vague yet

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[282]By practical effect Peirce does nothing more than insist on the engagement of Schiller's "sensual drive." See Elizabeth M. Wilkinson and L. A. Willoughby, translators and editors, *Friedrich Schiller, On the Aesthetic Education of Man, in a Series of Letters* (Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1967, original 1795).

as true so far as it is definite, and as continually tending to define itself more and more, and without limit" (6.466).

Without a foundation on unquestionable first principles on which to build meaning and with no hope for final closure of meaning, Peirce's pragmatism carves out a distinctly modern position. The hope offered in his conception of inquiry is that the process is self-critical and self-correcting. Hypotheses that do not accord with practical effects are abandoned. Pragmatism (or the synonymous hypothesis and abduction) is the method of methods, the guide toward meaning.

But what accounts for abduction? What accounts for the measure of correctness of hypotheses chosen when there is a seemingly infinite possibility to choose incorrect hypotheses? Is abduction logically based, a random consequence of chance, or an inexplicable psychological phenomenon? These problems engaged Peirce throughout his life.

Peirce attributed abduction to "the spontaneous conjectures of instinctive reason" (6.475), that is, he held that to construct and choose hypotheses is as instinctive to the nature of being human as nest building is to bird nature. "It must be confessed that if we knew that the impulse to prefer one hypothesis to another really were analogous to the instincts of birds and wasps, it would be foolish not to give it play, within the bounds of reason; especially since we must entertain some hypothesis, or else forego all by that very means" (6.476).[283]

Peirce argues that abduction is based on *il lume naturale*; that it is not only of human nature to be engaged in hypothetic inference,[284] but that the hypotheses we choose on impulse are also chosen for the reason of being the more facile and natural (6.477).

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[283]There are remarkable correlations between Peirce's view of hypothetic inference and the work done by neuroscientist Michael S. Gazzaniga, *Nature's Mind: The Biological Roots of Thinking, Emotions, Sexuality, Language, and Intelligence* (New York: Basic Books, 1992) and Lakoff and Johnson's work in *Philosophy in the Flesh*.

[284] I have moved progressively towards appreciating human biology as foundational for such processes. Although Peirce doesn't explicitly develop a biologically based position the suggestion in there in his appeal to the distinctiveness of human nature.

Though it is but conjunctive to Peirce's concern, it might be argued that, though often exhilarating, surprise is unstable and threatening to human beings.[285] Surprise, in the logical context of inquiry, motivates a reaction of seeking dissipation that is instinctual just as is physical surprise. That is, we construct hypotheses to dissipate the surprise encountered in inquiry as instinctively as we blink or wince in self-preservation at the surprise of physical threat to well-being. While there is a drive to dissipate surprise, the question is whether that drive is effected through a logical process, that is, whether there is continuity between the inquiry that leads to the selection of hypotheses and the methods of inquiry that evaluate selected hypotheses. While many hold that there is not continuity here, that discovery is inexplicable at least in the terms of inquiry, Peirce advanced abduction as a stage of inquiry yet expanded the notion of instinct to include the logic of discovery. I will consider this more fully below. First, an abductive interlude.

In the spirit of provocation that characterizes "The Neglected Argument," I am interested primarily in creatively contemplating some of the implications of Peirce's understanding of inquiry. Others have conducted critical discussions that I need not repeat, though this area of Peirce's thought remains disappointingly unexplored. I want to approach this by way of abduction itself.

Surprising fact C, Peirce wrote to Lady Welby: "As to the word 'play,' the first book of philosophy I ever read (except *Whately's Logic*, which I devoured at the age of 12 or 13,) was Schiller's *Aesthetische Briefe*, where he has so much to say about the *Spiel-Trieb*; and it made so much impression upon me as to have thoroughly soaked my notion of 'play,' to this day."[286]

In the decade or so before his death Peirce maintained an active correspondence with Victoria Lady Welby. With mutual

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[285] Surprise for Peirce must be seen as akin to "incongruity" for Smith. I have tended towards a discussion of the constant copresence of coherence/incoherence as founded in the biology of animate beings, and particularly distinct in human beings, that is more interesting than meaning and is inseparable from self-moving body and vitality.

[286] Charles S. Hardwick (ed.), *Semiotic and Significs: The Correspondence Between Charles S. Peirce and Victoria Lady Welby* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1977), p. 64.

admiration they read and commented on each other's writings and ideas. In December 1908 the exchange included discussion of Peirce's "A Neglected Argument." Peirce's inclusion of play did not go unnoticed by Lady Welby who wrote: "And Play too; which we so often connect, not with the Play of cosmical forces or of controlled impetus, but with the mere random wandering, a sign of mental disease, which no true Play can be."[287]

Peirce's response to Lady Welby is abducting in suggesting that, with Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* in mind we review Peirce's understanding of play and, not only play but, abduction and, not only abduction but, his pragmatism and, not only his pragmatism but, his whole tripartite program.[288] This retroduction (a leading backwards) to Schiller produces the general hypothesis that Schiller's *Letters* were influential to Peirce not only on his understanding of play but on his understanding of inference, including abduction, which is synonymous with his pragmatism, and inseparable from his whole semiotic.

What I want to explore is that in the light shed by Peirce's late conjunction of play (drawn, I believe, ultimately if not fully consciously from Schiller) and abduction, we can illuminate the fundamental character of his abduction and pragmatism. I am not primarily interested in showing that Peirce is dependent on Schiller, how Peirce advanced Schiller's ideas, or anything of this sort. I believe that Schiller's ideas on human nature, particularly those clustering around his conception of play and the play drive, when conjoined with Peirce's ideas on abduction and pragmatism, produce an enhanced understanding of the nature of play and consequently of the logic of discovery. I am interested in what happens in the play back and forth from Peirce to Schiller to Peirce.

Peirce identified musement, and thereby play, as an example of the first stage of inquiry. Whereas musement (Pure Play is Peirce's alternate term) leads eventually to the most global of hypotheses, the reality of God (the *ens necessarium*), this "'Humble Argument' is nothing but an instance of the first stage of all such

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[287] Hardwick, *Semiotic and Significs,* 64.
[288] Peirce does not mention Schiller in "The Neglected Argument." Caution must be made not to be confused by his mention (6.485) of F. S. C. Schiller whose ideas on pragmatism he criticized.

work, the stage of observing the facts, or variously rearranging them, and of pondering them until ... there is 'evolved' ... an explanatory hypothesis" (6.488).

Schiller held that "Man plays only when he is in the full sense of the word a human being, and he is only fully a human being when he plays."

Peirce rests the inferential process, particularly abduction, on human instinctive reason, on *il lume naturale*. "Instinctive mind" is mature mind. "Our logically controlled thoughts compose a small part of the mind, the mere blossom of a vast complexus, which we may call the instinctive mind" (5.212).

Schiller accounted, in one of several iterations, for the nature of being human in terms of a set of three drives or impulses: the formal, the sensual, and the play drives. Schiller understood the formal and sensuous drives as two contrary, yet constitutive, forces. The one seeks absolute reality, universality, form; the other seeks existentiality, particularity, and brute physicality. While these drives oppose one another and are mutually exclusive, they are nonetheless both necessary, necessarily copresent. They find coherence and meaning only in a third drive, the play drive, in which a reciprocal action between the two drives both gives rise to and sets limits on the activity of the other. In the play drive each of the other drives achieves its highest manifestation but precisely by reason of the other being active.

Peirce struggled throughout his life to make a precise distinction between abduction and induction. At times he held them to be opposites, at opposite poles of reason: abduction seeks a theory while induction seeks facts (7.218). By another kind of distinction, he said that hypothesis produces the sensuous element of thought while induction produces the habitual element (2.643). Deduction seems so clearly distinct from both that it figures little in these discussions. Deduction is logical explication, an affair largely of formal logic. Induction and deduction seem always to form a complementary pair that Peirce contrasted with abduction. Neither induction nor deduction, in contrast to abduction, adds to knowledge; their role is to test and explore hypotheses that issue from abduction. The challenge Peirce faced in articulating the elements of inference was to both clearly distinguish among these three types or stages

and to appreciate the interrelationships among them. While the three are held to be distinct, all are concerned in some sense both with principle (law, form, structure, unity, generality) and with case (experience, sense, facts, observations). Deduction tips the scale toward the side of principle; induction toward the side of the case. Abduction mediates between the two, beginning with the observation of a surprising fact—surprise itself is experiential—and ending with the embracing of likely principle, that is, hypothesis.

The parallels between Peirce and Schiller on these matters are too remarkable to ignore. Peirce himself saw play as an example of abduction and, as shown, he attributed his understanding of play to the influence of Schiller's *Spieltrieb*. It takes little imagination to suggest a parallel between deduction and Schiller's formal drive and between induction and Schiller's sensual drive. The clarity gained by viewing Peirce in the light of Schiller's *Spieltrieb* is in the terms of the interdependent, yet distinct, elements of this tripartite system. This playful comparison suggests that induction, deduction, and abduction are not wholly separate and independent from one another. Similar to Schiller's conception of play, abduction engages, foreshadows, anticipates, and encompasses both induction and deduction. The inferential processes that lead to the establishment of knowledge do not, except in the most idealized sense, follow a single track of three successive stages, as Peirce's later conceptions held, running from abduction through deduction to a conclusion in induction. These processes engage iterations and oscillations, a movement back and forth among these modes that, while analytically separable, are in process inseparable.

Reframing Peirce's understanding of inquiry in light of Schiller's *Spieltrieb* suggests that Peirce's conception of hypothetic inference was an attempt to acknowledge that the highest achievements of human inquiry are won not through inductive or deductive inference, but through that creative mode in which each finds its fulfillment in the activities of the other, in that mode where the mediation between the sensual and formal is most at play. The whole field of inquiry is a field of play, an abductive field. The poles that distinguish the limitations on the play within this field are induction—to the side of experience, data, and cases—and deduction—to the side of form, principle,

and theory. As the contrasting, yet interdependent, nature of these poles is appreciated, there is the rise of abduction, which, when conceived in its most ideal terms, designates that creatively playful process that gives rise to hypothesis in the conjunction of the inductive and deductive modes, the bootstrap to the advancement of knowledge.

While Peirce made repeated efforts to clearly distinguish abduction and induction, he understood the continuity between them. In an illuminating passage Peirce says that "when we stretch an induction quite beyond the limits of our observation, the inference partakes of the nature of hypothesis. It would be absurd to say that we have no inductive warrant for a generalization extending a little beyond the limits of experience, and there is no line to be drawn beyond which we cannot push our inference; only it becomes weaker the further it is pushed" (2.640).

But every induction goes beyond what has been directly observed.[289] Induction occurs precisely with the inference that some whole population is probably like a sample in a certain regard. Thus, induction is always in some sense the kind of extension that Peirce called abduction. In this passage Peirce clearly acknowledged continuity between induction and abduction. He attempted to point to that area where induction blurs into abduction. The same continuities and blurrings might be drawn between abduction and deduction. Problems are resolved, clarity gained, if we interpret, or perhaps extend, Peirce as understanding that inquiry is constituted by a field at play with induction and deduction being poles within that field and abduction being at once the dynamic play of the field as well as a conception of the most creative mode in the process of inquiry.

Peirce noted that deduction is conducted primarily in terms of symbols, that is signs that represent their object as a matter of convention, although that in some respects deduction also engaged icons, signs that represent their objects by resembling them, and indexes, signs that represent their objects by being

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[289]This is shown in the analysis of William H. Davis, "Synthetic Knowledge as 'abduction'," *Southern Journal of Philosophy* (Spring, 1970): 37-43 and in K. T. Fann, pp. 22-23.

actually connected with them (6.471). Continuing this line of analysis in the present abductive mode suggests that abduction is conducted in terms of all types of signs, but that it tends to be dominated by icons.

Discovery is commonly described as occurring in a flash; it is a sudden insight, a moment when one sees or conceives wholly. The linear, time elapsing, processes of explicative deductive logic are seen as a whole; the processes of sampling and the inductions from them are seen in a moment. It is as if the processes of inference are seen from above as an image instantly graspable in total. This is consistent with Schiller's description of the *Spieltrieb* as "directed towards annulling time within time, reconciling becoming with absolute being and change with identity" (XIV.3). More must be made of this in a discussion of the logic of discovery.

The provocative conjunction of Peirce and Schiller is furthered by the recent translators of Schiller's *Letters*, Elizabeth Wilkinson's and L. A. Willoughby's analysis of the form and structure of the *Aesthetic Letters*. In the *Letters*, Schiller seems to be operating with two completely unreconciled and irreconcilable strata of thought. One is based in a three-phase theory of cultural development in which human progress moves from the physical through the aesthetic to the moral. The other stratum is a kind of synthesis theory in which the physical and the moral are to be reconciled in the aesthetic. Schiller tends to oscillate among the two introducing by means of this play a higher tripartite structure. In Wilkinson's and Willoughby's analysis, nearly everything Schiller did must be understood in the terms of a tripartite structure.[290] In an appendix to their translation of Schiller's *Letters*, Wilkinson and Willoughby present diagrams to help illustrate the structure of Schiller's thought. Notably they use triangular diagrams to illustrate three types of synthesis Schiller used as well as how these triangles might be strung hierarchically together for the fullest appreciation of Schiller's concepts.[291] One type of synthesis is distinguished by the term

[290]See particularly the analysis, Wilkinson and Willoughby, *Friedrich Schiller*, p. li.
[291]This analysis is carried out even more fully in Elizabeth M. Wilkinson, "Reflections After Translating Schiller's *Letters On the Aesthetic Education*

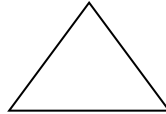at the apex being different from either term at the base, for example:

Spieltrieb (Play Drive)
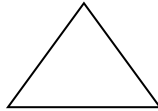
(Sensuous Drive) *Stofftrieb*   *Formtrieb* (Form Drive)

In a second type, a single concept is polarized by qualifying adjectives, as in:

NOTWENDIGKEIT (necessity)

physische Notwendigkeit   *moralische Notwendigkeit*
(physical necessity)   (moral necessity)

Identified as binary synthesis, the third type is designated by the term at the apex being the same as one of those at the base, but printed in capitals to indicate that it is a higher concept, embracing both the limited concept of the same name and its opposite, as for example:

FREIHEIT (freedom)
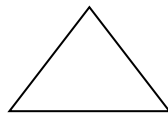
Natur (nature or character)   *Freiheit* (freedom)[292]

It is also important that, according to Wilkinson's and Willoughby's analysis, the structure of Schiller's letters is best

of Man," in *Schiller Bicentenary Lectures*, edited by F. Norman (London: University of London, Institute of Germanic Languages and Literatures, 1960), pp. 46-82.

[292]Wilkinson and Willoughby, *Friedrich Schiller*, pp. 349-350.

comprehended in terms of a succession in threes, that Schiller repeatedly proposed some "third thing."

Since Peirce acknowledged reading Schiller's *Aesthetic Letters* as one of his first books on philosophy and it is known that the book was the subject of Peirce's careful study, a fuller analysis of Peirce in light of the tripartite structures of Schiller's conceptions might prove a fruitful source of Peirce's obsession with three-part structures, but this is a subject for Peirce specialists. It is sufficient here that these parallels between Peirce and Schiller suggest further clarification of Peirce's conception of abduction.

From the perspective of inference being composed of various kinds of leadings: the relationships among retroduction (leading back) or abduction (leading away from center), induction (leading inward), and deduction (leading downward) are representable as the distinct points of an equilateral triangle. These three are distinct in the terms of the direction by which their logic proceeds.
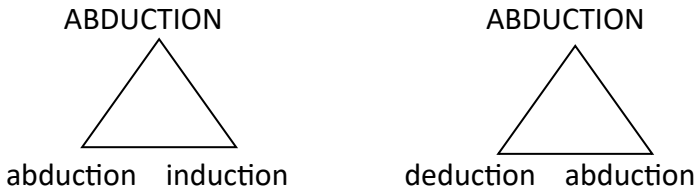
Abduction

Deduction   Induction
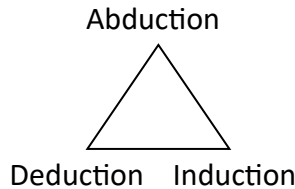
But from the perspective of the process by which knowledge is advanced, abduction stands first in a three-phase process followed by deduction and induction. Here they are distinguished by virtue of their place in a somewhat idealized process.

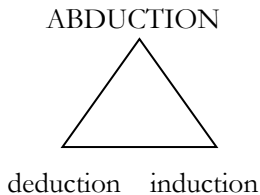Abduction ———> Deduction ———> Induction

From the perspective of the logic of discovery, that is, the systematic and formal modes that lead to the selection of hypotheses to be tested, triangles again help illustrate the synthetic relationship. First, abduction might be understood in its relationship to induction and deduction by a two-triangle representation. In each triangle abduction occupies a place both at the apex of a triangle (where it is capitalized) and at one angle point on the base (where it is not capitalized). The other base

angle is occupied in each triangle respectively by induction and deduction.

ABDUCTION

ABDUCTION

abduction   induction   deduction   abduction

These triangles show the logical continuity between abduction and induction and deduction. There are blurrings between them, continuities among them.

Continuing to the next aspect of this relationship, abduction, particularly when conceived in terms most parallel to Schiller's *Spieltrieb*, must be seen as encompassing and including both induction and deduction. Here, in triangular terms, abduction is at the apex, capitalized to emphasize the encompassing nature, with induction and deduction occupying the points at the base. This presentation incorporates and combines the above two triangles, and the analyses they represent.

ABDUCTION

deduction   induction

Abduction, when characterized as play, is a both-and-neither mode of inquiry. It is both deductive and inductive in that it mediates experience and form. It is not only mediative it is also encompassing, that is, induction and deduction each finds its fulfillment in terms of the other—the sphere of this fulfillment is abduction. Abduction may be analytically isolated, clearly distinct from deduction and induction, as the mode of inquiry in which hypotheses are constructed and accepted (selected), but it is continuous with induction and deduction in that both are anticipated (seen as a whole) in the iconic signs of hypothetic

inference. The "may be or may be not" vitalizing feature of hypothesis is never lost to induction or deduction.[293]

Peirce saw pragmatism as a method of methods—that is, a second order abstraction. Pragmatism is not seated on first principles nor driven by the promise of a final goal. From the perspective of pragmatism, the motivation to seek knowledge through inquiry is as much in the vitalizing nature of the process as in the value of the knowledge that is thereby gained. Inquiry is not to gain anything so much as it is to do something vitalizing and that can, I believe, be suitably characterized as play, at least as derived from the analysis of Schiller's *Letters*.

Once we have won this point, there are provocative implications in terms of the ongoing discussion of the logic of discovery.

It is commonly denied that discovery is even accessible to analysis. For example, Karl Popper argued, "The initial stage, the act of conceiving or inventing a theory, seems to me neither to call for logical analysis nor to be susceptible of it."[294] John Wisdom wrote, "There is no rational machinery for passing from observational premises to an inductive generalization but

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[293]Gregory Bateson sees "exploration" as a case exemplary of this double description, and rather remarkably, though he does not cite Peirce, he discusses the method of exploration he calls "abduction" which he defines as the "lateral extension of abstract components of description" (Bateson, *Mind and Nature: A Necessary Unity*, London: Bantam Publishing, 1988, p. 142). It is that process by which we describe some event or thing and then look about the world finding other cases that fit the same rules that we devised for our description. It is that process in which once I have conceived of play as connected to difference and to abduction in one place, I, seemingly remarkably and uncannily to me, find it (or something very like it) everywhere I turn.

Abduction is, according to Bateson, widespread, inseparable from metaphor, dream, parable, allegory, the whole of art, science and religion, and the whole of poetry. Bateson even illustrates abduction through a discussion of totemism. Abduction is foundational to all thought. It is the process of double or multiple description and the chiasmatic processes that create new information. It is key to all inquiry.

[294]Karl R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (New York: Basic Books, 1959), p. 20.

that hypothesis is attained by some mental jump."[295] Thomas Kuhn concluded, "The new paradigm ... emerges all at once, sometimes in the middle of the night, in the mind of a man deeply immersed in crisis. What the nature of that final stage is—how an individual invents (or finds he has invented) ... must here remain inscrutable and may be permanently so."[296] There seems little to gain by holding to this position. Based on my analysis of Peirce in light of Schiller's *Spieltrieb*, discovery is a necessary dimension of all inquiry. It is the epitome of the playfulness of inquiry.

The confoundment over whether there is or is not a logic of discovery shares features with the present widespread misunderstandings of play. Play has been mistakenly approached primarily in terms of a supposed contrast or opposition to work, to the serious, to the real. Thus, even before it is considered, it is categorized as extraordinary, exceptional, abnormal, unreal. Parallel to this misunderstanding, discovery has been understood as an unexplainable unanalyzable moment outside of logic. However, looking back to Schiller's understanding, play characterizes the mediation between form and sense, between the particular and the universal. Play is the drive or impulse in which human beings not only gain their fullest achievement, but also the terms that best characterize what distinguishes human nature. And, in a similar manner, Peirce understood abduction as characterized by that mediation between observation and explanation. While there are elements of mediation even in the most polarized phases of observation or explanation, discovery is most creative and radical at those points of greatest mediation, where the distance between observation and explanation is the greatest. This play is progressively diminished as one approaches the polar positions. The heuristic potency of inquiry peaks in the regions of greatest mediation. To say this more colloquially: the most unlikely the hypothesis, the most provocative it is, a

[295]John O. Wilson, *Foundations of Inference in Natural Science* (London, 1952), p. 49.
[296]Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 2nd ed. 1970), pp. 89-90.

function Peirce provides with the curious term "esperable uberty."[297]

The logic of discovery is then none other than the logic of inquiry; inquiry is inseparable from discovery. But the very process of logic seems to be defied in those events of greatest discovery, where there is a seeming break, the appearance of a new shaft of light, the introduction of something new. Such moments of discovery appear to exclude the processual temporal nature of reason. If hypothesis arises in a flash of insight[298] there is no process to which hypotheses are the conclusions or results. How can there be a logic of discovery?

One clue to comprehending this logic is found in Peirce's designation that deduction, while including indexical and iconic signs deals predominantly in those signs he designated as symbols. To follow the clue, icons are signs that represent their objects by exemplifying or resembling them, for example, maps and diagrams. But icons are not exclusive of indexes and symbols. Maps are composed of figures that are designated by convention as representing some object (though these often resemble the objects represented). The labels identifying territories are indexical in that the labels and designated territories are physically contiguous. A feature of the iconic character of mapping is that it is taken in at a moment, a semiotic function capable of translating the temporal and spatial into the timeless and spaceless. A journey charted on a map is iconic in the sense that it represents the whole journey by resembling it in one respect. The arrowed lines drawn on the map resemble the journey across the physical territory. Yet whereas the journey unfolds in time and space and in its actual course may signifi-

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[297] It would seem that this observation might have some tension with Occam's Razor that encourages the selection among possible solutions to choose the simplest one. However, it is obvious that should the most unlikely solution to be accurate would produce the result with the greatest impact.

[298] In neurological intervals, what seems a flash of insight might designate a considerable interval in which there is a resounding backward referral in time comprising an extraordinarily complex biological process. I have referred to this interval as the "fat present." See Gill, "It is bigger on the inside! TARDIS & Wormholes," in *Religion and Technology*.

cantly vary from the charted journey, the journey, when mapped, is grasped at once in its totality.

The logic of discovery is logic translated into an iconic dimension. The occasion of discovery may be thought of as the momentous grasping in total of the course of logic that proceeds from a hypothetic position to its validation. Obviously, induction and deduction have an iconic aspect, though it is argued that these inferential processes hold in greater predominance other types of signs. Iconic signs are especially suited to discovery in their ability to facilitate the simultaneous holding of multiple and, often conflicting, courses of reasoning. A simple example is the children's puzzle "one of these is not like the other." This feature is necessary to any process of choice or mediation. As one may observe at a glance multiple routes and journeys upon a map, one can only physically travel but one of these roads at a time, along an inviolable linear sequence. The iconic processes of logic engaged in hypothetic inference are like comparing and evaluating multiple and possibly conflicting courses of logic. When, in moments of discovery, we suddenly "see" the way, "grasp" the hypothesis, we engage logic in an iconic modality. If asked why we chose one hypothesis over another, we can provide reasons as easily as we can for providing reasons for choosing one route over another when consulting a map.[299] But this involves a transformation away from the iconic mode.

There is nothing exclusive or extraordinary about the logic of discovery. It is merely an iconically dominated modality of logic. What distinguishes discovery is not the presence or absence of logic, but the span of mediation, the playfulness of the inquiry, the sign types of the logic engaged, the uberty or potential fruitfulness of the inquiry. Where the mediation between observation and explanation is greatest, where the proposed hypothesis varies most from that domain of currently operative theory, the potential significance of the discovery is greatest and likely more exclusively iconic in the logical forms employed.

What logical criteria pertain to the selection of hypotheses? Peirce suggested a number of factors: the economic effective-

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[299]See Fann, *Peirce's Theory of Abduction*, p. 41.

ness and the logical simplicity.[300] In light of seeing abduction as characterized in terms of play with abduction being distinguished as the most playful region in the play field of inquiry, I suggest that hypotheses may also be chosen on the basis of their potential play (uberty), that is the subjective relative valuation of the openness, creativity, freedom, and challenge of the hypothesis. The higher the potential play of a hypothesis, the more deductive and inductive action it will spawn. This is like selecting a journey on a map because it is most scenic or because it promises to take one into regions least traveled. Surely hypotheses are not always selected on the degree of promise that they will produce acceptable explanations to immediate problems. Were that the case, hypotheses would tend always to be highly conservative. It is the degree to which they open to the unknown, more than the promised immediate closure of the unknown, that makes hypotheses especially attractive. In the hypotheses we embrace, we see in a glimpse all sorts of things we will be taken toward while not knowing precisely or with certainty how they will turn out.

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[300]See 6.477, Fann, *Peirce's Theory of Abduction*, pp. 45-53. The whole hypothetic process is commonly stemmed by the presentation of several stock hypotheses that are selected to terminate, often prematurely, the more complex processes of constructing hypotheses that will require testing and evaluation. We maintain a whole inventory of these hypotheses related to the following ideas: 1) "I'm surprised by something, but that must be due to my ignorance." This statement implies that we willingly accept our ignorance, at least in some areas. 2) "I'm surprised by something, but I can't pay attention to every quirk; this is someone else's department." This statement reflects an atomized world of specialization where we ignore all but what is in our own purview. 3) "I'm surprised by something; 'How Surprising!'" This statement acknowledges that the world does not always make sense and to simply acknowledge surprise dispenses with the motivation to generate explanatory hypotheses. 4) "I'm surprised by something; indeed, so surprised am I that I cannot think at all." This statement accounts for the emotion of surprise or amazement that is so great that it trips our overload switches. 5) "No fact, A to Z, in any context can surprise me." This statement reflects either the naive or the smugly cosmopolitan. These statements were developed in my *Native American Religious Action* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1987), p. 14.

The logic of abduction, the selection of hypotheses, may be conceptualized using patterns of correlation between the potential play (similar to potential energy) of the hypothetic structure and the play tolerance of the one contemplating the acceptance of the hypothesis. A play-based perspective may be especially stimulating when conjoined with the consideration of the patterns of the history of science as presented in Thomas Kuhn's highly influential 1962 book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.

The prevailing image has held that scientific development is a matter of accumulation, that is, scientific research incrementally adds to the total body of knowledge. Kuhn concluded that this image is fundamentally misleading. In his reading of the history of science, Kuhn did not find support for this accumulation view leading him to propose a revolutionary process in which crises in current accepted bodies of knowledge, or in his terms paradigms, eventually reach such urgency that they precipitate the replacement of the existing paradigm, or body of operative hypotheses, by an entirely different one. It is an image of the history of science as a series of paradigm shifts, revolutions.

Revolution, he argues, is not an everyday affair in science. Kuhn uses the term "normal science" to designate the phase of science operating under an accepted paradigm not overly threatened by a crisis of failure. Normal science is the science of the received tradition, the science of textbooks, the science whose research is "a strenuous and devoted attempt to force nature into the conceptual boxes supplied by professional education."[301] This is the science Kuhn describes as directed toward problem solving, that is, attacking tasks that are known to be in the grasp of the operative paradigm. Normal science fits the usual image of science as steady accumulation. According to Kuhn, the grounding of a normal science is identified by the somewhat ambiguous term paradigm. "A paradigm is what the members of a scientific community share, and conversely a scientific community consists of men who share a paradigm."[302] Normal science seeks confirmation of the paradigm and success

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[301] Kuhn, *Structure*, 5.
[302] Kuhn, *Structure*, 176.

is measured in these terms. Novelty or anomaly are often ignored or denied; indeed, these terms are themselves dependent on paradigm.

Yet what accounts for discovery in the full sense of the introduction of new paradigm? Kuhn charts the course in normal science that leads to revolution, to the rupture in which one paradigm replaces another. The key is the persistence of anomaly—the extent of felt nonlinearity—that finally leads normal science to crisis. From this crisis a set of new theories may be generated and, though it often takes a generation to accomplish, they eventually become established as the new reigning paradigm. "Extraordinary science" is the term Kuhn uses to designate this phase of paradigm discovery, of the invention of a body of new theory, of the creation of a new paradigm. Once a new paradigm gains acceptance, a new phase of normal science unfolds.

It is important to consider the nature of anomaly and novelty, though Kuhn does not do so directly.[303] Anomaly and novelty are concepts that have to do with fit. In terms of theory, anomaly occurs when data or observations fail to find adequate explanation by a given theory. Anomaly (nonlinearity) motivates either a review of data or a revision in theory. If anomaly leads to theory revision, then one must posit that there is something inherent in the data that remains the same from one theory to another. This suggests there is an underlying matrix, or perhaps we could say paradigm, that gives base to such decisions and processes. In other words, there can be no anomaly if there is not some given matrix (paradigm) within which something does not fit.[304]

This logic makes sense within what Kuhn calls "normal science," but he describes the same process as operative in scientific revolutions where there are shifts in paradigm. Anomaly, though at first suppressed or ignored, eventually constitutes crisis at the level of paradigm motivating the revolution and

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[303]However, see his description of anomaly in Thomas Kuhn, *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), p. 236.

[304] In the structure of comparison, the criteria by which items are compared functions in the same role as paradigm.

paradigm shift. But what serves more fundamentally or globally than paradigm as a place from which to choose a new paradigm to replace the present one? Kuhn refers to this, curiously I believe, in the terms of "problem." For example, when discussing why a new paradigm is adopted to replace an old one he writes that "probably the single most prevalent claim advanced by the proponents of a new paradigm is that they can solve the problems that have lead the old one to a crisis."[305] But he also holds that problems are paradigm dependent[306] as are even the data.[307] What in the frame of one paradigm are problems, even acknowledged data, are not necessarily so in another. To even say that a new paradigm solves problems that led another to crisis implies not only that the normal function of paradigms is to solve problems (which is, of course, Kuhn's understanding of normal science), but also that the problems precede and exist apart from the paradigms, which Kuhn at least at one point denies.[308]

Kuhn offers other reasons for choosing paradigms, though he sees these reasons as much more limited. A new paradigm may be said to be aesthetically more pleasing: neater, simpler. He also suggests that "something must make at least a few scientists feel that the new proposal is on the right track, and sometimes it is only personal and inarticulate aesthetic considerations that can do that." The questionable implications are that personal and aesthetic valuations are necessarily inarticulate, that such valuations are independent of paradigm, and that such phrases as "right track" are independent of paradigm.

Kuhn understands paradigm in the global terms of worldview. One sees the world in the terms of paradigm. Problem, aesthetic and personal judgment, evaluations of "right track," "wider range," "greater precision"[309] must be of paradigm, yet these are the foundational positions Kuhn discusses as the bases on which rest decisions for paradigm shifts. This tension raises

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[305] Kuhn, *Structure*, 153.

[306] Kuhn, *Structure*, 166.

[307] Kuhn, *Structure*, 122.

[308] Kuhn's critics have focused heavily on the circularity of his argument. See Imre Lakotos and Alan Musgrave (editors), *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970).

[309] Kuhn, *Structure*, 66.

fundamental questions about Kuhn's argument. Normal science, seen as problem solving rooted in the accepted paradigm, is defined by its problems. Yet it is the superior ability to solve problems, the very same problems, that is the basis for overthrowing one paradigm for another. Somehow the problems, in Kuhn's analysis, must be at once subject to and superior to paradigm.

The same confoundment may be seen underlying Kuhn's discussion of progress. The very concept of science is, as Kuhn notes, inseparable from progress. Science has no difficulty whatsoever in making the claim of progress in knowledge. "A scientific community is an immensely efficient instrument for solving the problems or puzzles that its paradigms define."[310] But progress is also paradigm dependent. When considering the sequence of paradigm shifts that constitutes the history of science, Kuhn concludes "We may, to be more precise, have to relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth."[311] This position on truth reveals some confusion about what is exclusive of paradigm. This statement suggests that while progress is paradigm dependent, truth is not. But how then can truth have any meaning if it is virtually inaccessible? Kuhn holds that to reject paradigm is to reject science altogether.

What then motivates scientific inquiry? It can no longer be the achievement of truth, the end and completion of knowledge as Stephen Hawking would have it. Kuhn suggests a shift from a goal-oriented imagery to the imagery of evolution in progress; that we pursue science in the "evolution-from-what-we-do-know."[312] This is a "process that moved steadily from primitive beginnings but toward no goal."[313] But this is a continuous and continuing process given significance by an evolution-type paradigm.[314] This is the view of a normal science. One wonders

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[310] Kuhn, *Structure*, 166.

[311] Kuhn, *Structure*, 170.

[312] Kuhn, *Structure*, 171.

[313] Kuhn, *Structure*, 172.

[314]It is remarkable given the history of controversy surrounding evolution that Kuhn is not the only one to appeal to it as the super-paradigmatic frame that links sequences of scientific paradigms, that

how it differs, other than the inclusion of a bit of jerkiness, from the image Kuhn seeks to replace.

Though it seems clear that Kuhn's attempt to correct the notion of science as accumulation is important, the manner by which he has attempted to do so raises the fundamental question "why science?" Beyond the processes of "normal science," to me he offers weak, if any, answers.

Kuhn himself attempts a paradigm shift, from science as accumulation to science as periodic revolution. But, to me, there are concerns. The acceptance of and the dwelling within a paradigm is what defines and distinguishes normal science. This is no qualified acceptance. It is no partial commitment to some new ideas. It is paradigmatic: foundational, determinative of problems, worldviews, and everything else. One lives and dies by paradigm. That is surely why it takes the turnover of a generation for a new paradigm to gain acceptance. The stability of paradigm is surely why Kuhn refers to a paradigm shift in terms of revolution. Yet the very substance of Kuhn's proposed paradigm, what might be called "the paradigm paradigm," is that paradigms are temporary, they do not achieve progress beyond themselves, they do not lead to truth. This is the paradigm of modernity for it is tacitly the rejection of paradigm. Knowing that paradigms are temporary, that even the succession of paradigms need not achieve progress toward truth, how can anyone embrace any paradigm? Kuhn's proposal is not simply a fundamental shift in epistemology and ontology, it also proposes their end, though curiously Kuhn seems not to acknowledge the weight of this position. It is a version of the rupture that Jacques Derrida and others describe as the challenge to the fixedness of structure that characterizes our age. While Kuhn's discussion

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characterizes the continuity of the scientific process. Stephen Hawking made essentially the same appeal in his *A Brief History of Time: From the Big Bang to Black Holes* (London: Bantam, 1988). Acknowledging that theory is always provisional, always beyond final proof, he raises the question of the judgment among possible theories. Kuhn's resolution is to see evolution as super-theoretical (as apparently are some scientists) writing, "Based on Darwin's principle of natural selection ... some individuals are better able than others to draw the right conclusions about the world around them and to act accordingly." Kuhn, *Structure*, p. 12. Wonder where Hawking places himself on this scale of values?

gives us a glimpse of a new way to see the history of science, he remains so confined to the language of one restrictive paradigm that he seems unable to see the impact of what he is suggesting. In that glimpse we see the nakedness of science, its lack of foundation garments. I think this contradiction finally defeats Kuhn's most basic point. When theory, valuation, progress, problems are paradigm dependent, there is no base, other than normal science, from which to choose a different paradigm. What Kuhn describes as normal science in last analysis is all-inclusive. All science is paradigm bound. Extraordinary science (which Kuhn discusses precious little anyway) is extraordinary in escaping the bounds of the operative paradigm, but in doing so ceases to be scientific, thus extraordinary science (whose task is discovery understood in the full sense of paradigm shift) is the extra-scientific. Losing extraordinary science and discovery we are back to the original image of science as accumulation (the characterization of normal science). The only possible recourse is to hold that new paradigms are somehow tacit to operative paradigms. Then it is not a matter of choosing between competing paradigms (which is itself paradigm dependent), but a matter of articulating tacit paradigms. One wonders if this process really amounts to revolution.

There is another factor that moves me closer to suggesting an alternative. This is Kuhn's choice of the contrasting category-ies "normal" and "extraordinary" which I find an interestingly odd choice. The most direct opposite of normal is abnormal; the opposite of extraordinary is ordinary. It may first appear sensible to choose normal to distinguish paradigm-bound processes, but this choice raises the problem of what to do with discovery which Kuhn preconceives as being beyond what scientists normally do. It would not seem appropriate to call those creative geniuses who discover whole new systems by the more directly opposite, seemingly offensive, term abnormal. They are truly extraordinary. However, if one begins with the identification of discovery (at level of revolution) as extraordinary, it would be somewhat offensive to call the balance of the scientific community ordinary. The questioning of terms may seem but a silly semantic problem, yet I think it should have given Kuhn pause. If discovery of new paradigm is not presupposed to be beyond paradigm or, to be even more inclusive, if discovery is

not presupposed to be beyond the processes of inquiry, there would be no need for these terms. These confusions would be eliminated, replaced by some much more interesting ones. All I am saying here is that Kuhn's terms normal and extraordinary betray tacit operative assumptions (based on paradigm) that underlay his whole program of scientific revolution and that the usefulness and accuracy of this tacit paradigm is somewhat questionable.

The contribution of Kuhn's work is to demonstrate that scientific growth occurs not solely as a continuous process of accumulation (which Kuhn understands to be a widely held misunderstanding), but rather includes shifts, revolutionary in order. Considering the history he reviews, this seems a laudable corrective. However, in divorcing discovery that is paradigm shifting from the daily processes of scientific inquiry, it at once tends to place discovery in the realm of the unanalyzable (the accidental, inexplicable, and even mysterious) and it ignores, if not denies altogether (much to many working scientists' dismay I would think), the discoveries and theoretical shifts made daily in the course of inquiry. Recall that Kuhn distinguishes these discoveries in terms of solving problems that normal science anticipates in terms of its embrace of the given paradigm. It also presents a perspective on the nature of being human that I do not particularly want to support (perhaps my own romanticism) which is that humans are normally not creators of hypotheses, they are normally drones of law to the point of filtering out anomaly and novelty. Kuhn, in attempting to show a more accurate picture of the processes of scientific discovery throws out the playfulness I believe is distinctive of being human albeit I recognize this is my operative paradigm.

Though he considers the process of discovery inaccessible to analysis, Kuhn describes discovery in language that seems in a measure related to Peirce. Kuhn writes,

> Novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation. Initially, only the anticipated and usual are experienced even under circumstances where anomaly is later to be observed. Further acquaintance, however, does result in awareness of something wrong or does relate the effect to something that has gone wrong before. That awareness

of anomaly opens a period in which conceptual categories are adjusted until the initially anomalous has become the anticipated. At this point the discovery has been completed.[315]

Kuhn makes no reference to Peirce in *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*s although Peirce had begun writing about discovery more than a century earlier. In terms of the above analysis, I believe that Peirce had already offered a more modern and fruitful understanding of discovery than did Kuhn.[316] Put in the terms of the above analysis of Peirce in light of Schiller the following account of the logic of discovery can be put forth.

Discovery, as play, is continuous with the whole field of inquiry, understood generally in this frame as the pursuit of knowledge and clarity of meaning. Discovery, as analogous to play, as a species of play, may be conceived as a characteristic of the nature of inquiry, an identification of that extension or expansion to which all inquiry at every stage and in its most basic sense is bent. As that which characterizes the structure of inquiry, play is always present as a distinguishing feature. To comprehend discovery is not a matter of ferreting out the phase of inquiry to which discovery is confined nor is it to exclude discovery from inquiry altogether.

The affinities between play and discovery are so great that the language of play may be illuminating to the discussion of discovery. As play, discovery can be subjectively evaluated and measured, at least in rough comparative terms. Indeed, this is a fundamental, though almost wholly ignored, aspect of the scientific process. Every laboratory finding is a discovery, if in no other than the simplest sense of extending a theory to a new area of application. That the play of the theory is not known with certainty for this new area of application is the motivation and justification for the experiment. Even the terms experiment and test include the dimension of extension that encompasses the notion of discovery, though in many examples it may be

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[315] Kuhn, *Structure*, 64.

[316] It is notable that, while Morton Kaplan, in his *Science, Language and the Human Condition* (New York: Paragon House, 1984), places himself in the lineage of Peirce's "pragmatism" and begins his book with a criticism of Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, he does not even mention Peirce's many discussions of abduction.

relatively minor. There are examples where discovery exists in larger proportions yet remains short of the sorts of revolution Kuhn recounts. Within a body of theory, applications, areas of relevance, implications, may be discovered initiating whole new areas of inquiry. Finally, at the extreme, there are those discoveries of revolutionary stature, those transformations synonymous with such names as Copernicus, Galileo, Newton, and Einstein.

Kuhn considers discovery to be either present or absent and reserves the term to designate those major events of revolutionary proportion. Were it possible to clearly distinguish discovery, to analyze and comprehend its logic, to set it apart by reference to definite criteria from the processes of normal inquiry where there are extensions of knowledge in steps and leaps, perhaps there would be some importance in taking this approach. However, as shown, confining the term discovery to those major revolutionary insights is usually accompanied by the predisposition that discovery is extraordinary, beyond analysis or description, an unfathomable mystery.

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"To risk meaning nothing is to start to play."[317] There is so much to appreciate in Derrida's statement. Play engages risk. Play raises the possibility of having no meaning. Play is a process that can be entered in to, started. There is an implication that play is somehow an engagement with human potential as Schiller wrote over two centuries ago "humans only play when they are in the fullest sense a human being and they are only fully human when they play."

According to Schiller, Peirce, Gadamer, Derrida, Bateson, Handleman, Smith, and so many more, play occurs in a field or a gap, where there is a creative encounter of opposites, where opposites are sometimes identical (at the least inseparable), where metastability or copresence prevail, where chiasm is engaging, where moving (often described as oscillating, resounding, reverberating) is energizing, where there is pursuit of goals that are ever receding horizons, where creativity and novelty emerge from the random and unexpected, where bodies

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[317] Derrida, *Ear and the Other*, 69.

and emotions link feeling to knowing, where biology transcends in incorporeal corporealities, where coherence is the tenuous ideal amidst an environment of misfit and disorientation (nonlinearity). Play is an ongoing process of fit that is fueled and guided largely by touch and feel and experience. Play is interplay, the oscillating ongoing negotiative engagement of fit, congruence, the urgency of resolution with the full embrace that such is not fully possible. It is inappropriate and foolhardy to ask of most things interesting "what does it mean?" Such is a question fitting only to things of limited frames and settings. To gain a response, as in a definitive conclusion, is, as Bergson noted a century ago a halting retroduction. Meaning and the question of meaning tends to halt play, rob it of its ongoing vitality.

Play is connected to discovery and creativity as well as vitality yet resists and rejects the halt of formulas and logical methods. Play is often an awareness of play; Bateson assures that there is always in play the metamessage, "this is play." Play is a kind of knowing, yet not a logical kind that can be analyzed and defined. Play is, in Peirce's terms, "a feeling kind of knowing." Peirce's wisdom on discovery is that the process is engaged based on the experience of surprise. Surprise is not an objective emotion; it is a subjective response to incongruity, to the sudden impact of the unexpected, to a coming awareness of an absence of fit, incongruity. The presence of incongruity motivates play; in thought (Ricoeur and Smith), or in action (kids, artists, dancers, athletes, musicians, movers, walkers). While the negotiative process of play may seem motivated by a desire for resolution, for coherence or answers or hypotheses, it might be more accurate to understand this vectored urge in terms of the way Barbaras understood the term "desire," that is, as a force of self-moving that is not fulfillable by meeting some conditions of need. Schiller recognized that being human is the vitalizing interplay between opposing forces or drives such as form and sense or, in this context, coherence and incoherence. Coherence correlates well with Schiller's form. We seek meaning as the marker of coherence, yet what we (academics particularly, but the broad tendency in modern society) may fail to appreciate is that the most important questions are not ones for which we are satisfied by finding answers, uncovering meaning. The most important questions are the ones that initiate play accompanied by the risk

of meaning nothing, nothing at all. Derrida offered a post-modern insight by positing that we may consider we have a choice between play and not play, then going on to point out that such a choice is itself the sort of halt that ends play. His descriptive language took a familiar path of suggesting images of monstrosity; what I've attempted to articulate as an aesthetic of impossibles, or the dynamics of creative encounter, or the whole genre of cyborgs and metahumans and androids that have populated the human imagination since antiquity.[318]

Fundamental to play, from the primary exempla of children playing to the most skilled play of musicians and dancers, is that it is thoroughly bodied. We become aware of incongruity and start to play as motivated by feeling kinds of knowing, the incidence of surprise or the feeling that something is or isn't right, or that general sense of malaise or excitement that things are out of place. While play may give rise to thought and while there is a play to many modes of thought (Peirce's musement or hypothetic inference, for example), it is engaged not solely as a logical or mental operation. There is a primacy of feeling, a feeling that biologically engages vitalizing processes. Such is the case in science as much as the arts and humanities.

Kuhn's and others' efforts to articulate the structure of scientific revolutions are foiled by their own mentalist and logical parameters. They finally accede to proclaiming discovery as incomprehensible. Yet to understand play as identified with the ongoing processes that are the forte of being human—the embrace of metastability and nonlinearity (the random and unanticipated and incalculable) and incongruity—is to engage something much more interesting, if also disturbing, than meaning. While we may not be able to define or give logical criteria to feeling kinds of knowing, to the experience of incongruity, we can describe and comprehend the background and conditions that are ripe for this experience. Such is the task of the historian and the psychologist. We can discover and tell the stories that set contexts for the expectation and congruity. We can even articulate the biological features on which we humans can recognize certain feelings in terms of rightness or feeling just-so. The Russian physiologist Nikolai Bernstein spent

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[318] Gill, *Religion and Technology.*

decades studying human movement.[319] What is important for us here is that he found that human physiology, human biology, is connected to a great variety of human movings that, as practiced by all human beings, might be described as smooth. Physically healthy and normal bodies correlate, in general parameters, with smooth motility and coordinated movement of various parts. It is a simple matter of health and survival. Thanks to kinesthesia, such movement feels right and is experienced as natural; often effortless, done without specific intention or concentration on the mechanics of self-moving. We simply walk or hold a glass and get it successfully to our mouths for a drink. Our encounter with the world is a process of a creative encounter via the interface of self-moving, moving that we feel ourselves doing. So-called jerky movings are experienced as uncomfortable and often signal pathology. Shaky hands or stumbling gate are symptoms of potential concern because they are not smooth. Daniel Stern[320] translated the experience of emotions into patterns that vary from the biologically based expectation of smooth movings. I suggest that our awareness of surprise or incongruity (often accompanied by erratic body jerks) is based on the primacy of the experience of smooth movement.

Smith's approach to religion(s), the actual cultural historical traditions as well as the invention of the scholar or the folk, is associated with play in his recognition that religion is the ongoing negotiative processes of application and the constant revision of the guiding maps (stories, beliefs, scriptures, practices). While he charted the polar positions that mark desired goals of religions—locative and utopian—he resolved that neither could be meet. Rather religions are phenomena of play. They are the two-faces of congruity (locative) and incongruity (utopian) that are similar to Schiller's form and sense. Religion(s) are only fully religious and worthy of human engagement when these two faces are interacting in concert (to invoke Schiller's term). Religions are comprised of skills of playing in the culturally and historically specific environments of coherence and

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[319] Nikolai Bernstein, *The Coordination and Regulation of Movement* (New York: Pergamon, 1967).
[320] Daniel Stern, *Forms of Vitality: Exploring Dynamic Experience in Psychology and the Arts* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2010).

incoherence. The distinction of religions is in the frame of play, often the realm of what I've termed an aesthetic of impossibles, that is, the creative positing of impossible worlds and beings accompanied by the impossible identity of those worlds with the world experienced every day. I believe Smith's understanding of religion(s) in these terms was strongly supported and initiated by his own experience of the incongruity in his efforts to understand what Frazer was about in *The Golden Bough*. Failing to find Frazer's meaning, coming to realize that discerning such meaning was impossible, Smith experienced the insight that Frazer was most interesting because of his intentional failure (that he did not seek to articulating some final meaning or conclusion about anything). Rather Smith saw that Frazer conjoined the comic and tragic in the many volumes of *The Golden Bough* revised again and again, not to hone it to some final articulation of meaning (a definitive explanation of the golden bough), but rather as endless play in the face of the absurdity that there is no final meaning in human life.

A truly academic study of religion may proceed, I believe, from these shifts in our assumptions. Body, self-moving, experience, feeling have primacy to both those we recognize as religious as well as to academic students of religion, not to the exclusion of criticism and technique or skill or training or the most stringent application of logic and reason, but because these biologically based dynamics of encounter are the driving motivators, the sources of the energetics, for all these practical and definable operations. Human biology—not in any sense reductive to some physicalist explanation of need but rather in the sense of the marvel of the banal capacity for transcending self and body by realizing its full biological potential—must be recognized for this primacy and the fullest implications must be explored. Locating a truly academic study of religion in the primacy of human biology, there is no objectively given "other" that can be comprehended or apprehended apart from what proceeds from human biology. A truly academic study of religion is one independent of the academic theology that has persisted through much of its modern history. Yet, it is a study of religion in which the presence of the *theos* is a product of an aesthetic of impossibles, a remarkable exercise of the human capacity for play. To approach the study of religion *sub specie ludi*,

we must shift much of our interpretive attention away from replacing the acts of others we call religious with our invention of what those acts mean toward our description and analysis of the factors that support the experience of feelings of fit or its absence, the momentary experience of congruity in the constant presence of incongruity, the playful articulation of locative or utopian ideals that fuel the endless playful processes of application and negotiation; to recognize religions and the study of religion as a genre of creative encounter.

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Gesture, Utilitarian Action, Skill[321]

The demands of my rising passion to explore skill and mastery have led me to, among other things, peruse the philosophical literature on skill. I was surprised and delighted to find skill an active topic recently experiencing a surge of interest with an extensive bibliography. Excitedly I began to explore this burgeoning literature anticipating provocative studies feeding my own teeming sense of the potential of this topic. Unfortunately, I was quickly disenchanted by the specialist jargony style of writing that I have found increasingly irritating after decades reading this style as an academic. I was even more disappointed by what seemed to me the paucity of creative ideas. I've sometimes referred to this style as the practice of *negative genius*, the penchant to make as dull and incomprehensible as possible what is, as experienced by everyone, inherently thrilling and exciting. Who doesn't love to watch Olympic competition in, say, halfpipe snowboarding marveling that any human being could strap a board on her feet and shoot up the wall of a snowy icy halfpipe spinning round and round while also hitting various poses and land perfectly back in the pipe to go on to perform a variety of other such moves? Who doesn't thrill, even if one is not into dancing, to see a ballerina, say Misty Copeland, *en pointe* performing endless pirouettes and gravity-defying split leaps? Who among us has not found ourselves engaged in some activity—tennis, ice skating, writing poetry, photography, fine woodworking, playing music—to discover, upon throwing ourselves into hundreds of hours of learning and practicing and being guided and critiqued by teachers and mentors and peers, that we have done so because doing so is such a joy? Skilled

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[321] From forthcoming *On Skill & Mastery.*

actions are utterly satisfying in their performance (autotelic). These activities and processes are what I have in mind when I hear the word "skill."

Plunging into the current publications on the philosophy of skill,[322] I was immediately disappointed that perhaps the most prominent topic is whether skill is "automatic or intellectual," the common phrasing philosophers use to distinguish "know-how and know-that."[323] This concern seemed a current, yet mostly unacknowledged, engagement of the ancient and classic discussion of *epistêmê* and *technê* which I'll consider later. Further, the answer to this seemingly endless discussion is rather obvious if anyone has (and who hasn't?) ever become excited about developing a skill. We practice, practice, practice seeking improvement (more so I think than automaticity, a term I think to be misleading), but even more we enjoy the action itself. We study technique and we proceed under the critical eye of mentors. And we learn relevant history and other related bodies of knowledge. We know that thinking about and actually doing these skills are sometimes separate, yet they are always interrelated. Reading the philosophy, I just kept wondering "have these philosophers never experienced the process of

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[322] A large collection of current papers on skill can be found in Ellen Fridland and Carlotta Pavese (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Skill and Experience,* New York: Routledge, 2021.

[323] I must admit, perhaps my intellectual shortcoming, I don't find the use of the terms "know-how" and "know-that" satisfactorily making a fundamental clear distinction. In common speech we often use the term "know-how" to refer to practical knowledge, expertise, or proficiency, as in, "when it comes to golf, she certainly has the know-how!" or "she sure knows how to hit a golf ball!" The term "know-that" is not so common a term, especially as hyphenated, yet in usage it generally indicates "awareness" as in "did she know that it was raining?" No matter how seemingly automatic (if one insists on this misleading term) a skill becomes I think we almost always "know-that" we are performing it, that is, that we are aware of doing what we are doing. We'd question the sanity of the subject in a statement "does she know-that she's hitting a golf ball?" But few would consider that skill is all "know-that" without the necessary "know-how." Despite my sense of the limitations of these terms they pervade the philosophical literature on skill.

acquiring and practicing and exercising a skill?" Their methods suggest that they ignore their own experience.[324]

My disappointment was not relieved as I read on. Rarely did I find any detailed examination of examples of specific skills. Those rare exceptions that did consider skill in pursuit of mastery often seemed shallow, missing what, in my experience, is most exciting. It seems that these philosophers' understanding of skill is reflected in their apparent satisfaction with frequent examples stated in the most general terms like "riding a bike" or "dancing." Only rarely do these philosophers mention what I think of as the *biography of a skill*, that is, the often-endless process of practice guided by technique-based critique through various phases from novice toward mastery. I also quickly became weary of the exclusionary binary logic common to these philosophical studies. Something is skill or not. Skill is automatic (know-how) or intellectual (know-that). Grandchildren of Descartes (well also of Plato), these philosophers bear their legacy by insisting that, no matter how automatic,[325] which means machinic, a skilled action seems to be, thinking, intellect-tion, propositional knowledge, know-that, precedes and accounts for skill formation and performance. A persistent issue

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[324] Such is not unusual or new. Daniel Heller-Roazen's book *The Fifth Hammer: Pythagoras and the Disharmony of the World* (New York: Zone Books, 2011) has as its core example Pythagoras's ignoring the experience of his own ears as well as "the fifth hammer" in his development of perhaps the first theory of harmony. I discussed this example as well in my *Religion and Technology into the Future: From Adam to Tomorrow's Eve* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018), especially Chapter Twenty-three "Step Again into the Forge," 253-57.

[325] While I'm in the mood, I think the term "automatic" is remarkably misleading. It generally means something that occurs by itself with little or no direct human control. As skill develops there is a shift in the object of the actor's control. In novice stages, the attention is commonly on the specific and smallest constituents of the actions comprising the skill. As dexterity and skill develop, the attention shifts to the larger segments (in neurological terms I identify these as synergies) and later the attention is shifted to the larger strategies or composites comprised of synergies or synergy complexes. Smoothness and dexterity commonly accompany this progression, yet it is never accurate to simply indicate it is an "absence of control" as the term "automatic" implies.

threading through the philosophy of skill is this preference for Descartes' *cogito* "I think therefore I am" often argued in the most tedious of fashions; lots of heavy thinking. I prefer "I act therefore I am" or, even better, "I self-move therefore I am."

My heritage, more that of Nataraja and Fred Astaire and Merleau-Ponty and Michel Serres, does not reverse the hierarchy to privileging muscular material mindless body as primary based perhaps on some functional principle of caloric or metabolic need. Rather I give primacy to the ongoingness that characterizes biomechanical as well as neurological and thinking processes. Simply put, and seemingly one would think obvious, we are whole organic self-moving beings comprised of many interacting and interdependent systems. I'm fascinated to explore skill and mastery because I think it engages a creative and demanding discourse that strives to comprehend and appreciate the fullest potential of the whole human being. Leaving aside a fuller critique of this focus of the philosophy of skill (I've perhaps already overplayed my irritations), what excites me regarding skill and mastery is not whether it is automatic or intellectual, it is rather that a careful exploration of skill, that includes embracing our own experience in acquiring and practicing skill, is a promising way to articulate distinctively human potentiality and to appreciate what characterizes us as human beings.

As my discovery of a passion for considering skill grew out of my exploration of gesture and posture and moving, I found myself being excited by a continuum with overlapping segments, more so than a typology, that includes gesture toward one end gradually transition to skill toward the other end with plenty of room for the various phases in the ongoingness of skill development towards mastery. Irritated when philosophers seemed satisfied with "riding a bike" or "dancing" as suitable examples of their understanding of skill, I was for a time confounded. Why did I not consider these simple examples satisfying? I realized that "riding a bike," in my experience, is a common competence that most of us gain as kids when a parent sits us on a bike seat, pushes us along, themselves running to keep us from falling off yelling "pedal!" Repeating this process a few times, with a break or two to bandage skinned knees and elbows, and off we go. "I'm riding a bike." Well, certainly we can consi-

der "riding a bike" a skill, but then consider BMX bikers doing flips off ramps high in the air while spinning their bikes around underneath them or think of road bikers in the Tour de France. I reflect on the many years I danced and taught salsa dancing. In the first beginning lesson I taught the basic salsa footwork and the minimal action for maintaining touch connection with partners. At the end of the first class, I encouraged my students to go salsa dancing telling them, "You can salsa dance." I spent many years dancing salsa, studying it in various countries with many expert teachers. I created my own teaching technique and produced instructional videos. I danced many thousands of hours and yet I was fully aware that, at my best, there were so many dancers far superior to me. There always would be. I also thought of those who cook. Maybe they take a class or two and can follow recipes to prepare a delightful meal. They can say "I can cook," yet what of the chefs who spend lifetimes mastering techniques and knowledge and food chemistry and how to develop tastes of food? These chefs learn through long experience the art of preparation and presentation. Most of the examples mentioned by the philosophers are of those skills whose "know-how" comes quickly and the practitioners are mostly satisfied at that. Most kids learn to ride a bike. They know how. Yet only a rare few go on to BMX or road biking; fewer still compete BMX or in prestige road races. I began to appreciate that our lives are loaded with learning how to do some activity requiring but a bit of effort and we are totally happy to simply continue doing this activity considering ourselves sufficiently competent. Like most, I can claim many of these competencies and I enjoy them all. I can cook. I can design and decorate a room. I can ride a bike. I can play a trumpet. I can play chopsticks and maybe another little tune or two on the piano. I can drive a car. I can type. I, like everyone, can do so many things that I had to learn or be taught but my basic competence is satisfying without feeling I need to pursue further advancement except perhaps little tweaks or to adjust to new gear occasionally.

Yet, for me, there was salsa dancing which I studied with a passion and learned everything I could about it historically, culturally, and practically. I took classes and competed and performed and critiqued myself and danced with those better

than me to critique me. I studied technique and style and variations and the complex history of the dance and the different rhythms. I learned and taught and coached a form of salsa called *rueda de casino*. I owned a dance studio where every week I taught many salsa classes at several levels. I taught in high school. I taught at the university. I taught private lessons. I created instructional videos. I traveled widely to study and practice salsa. I could describe a similar process for my passion for photography and writing. At this point I am exploring the learning of a new dance form, one that I know I'll never gain much more than minimal competency, yet I am doing so not in the casual way of gaining utilitarian competence, but because I want to intentionally explore and document my own experience, especially as an eighty-year-old man learning a dance done mostly by athletic young women.

It is becoming clear why I have been so irritated by philosophers exemplifying the topic skill with the example "riding a bike." Certainly, there are some shared characteristics between basic or utilitarian action and the novice stage of skill acquisition. One of these is acquiring, at some level, a sense in which the action comes to feel easy and smooth, seemingly requiring little attention or conscious application of propositional knowledge. Once we can ride a bike, we just do it. We don't have to think "pedal!" We don't have to understand the physics that relate balance to forward momentum. We don't have to know much of anything about bikes. We don't even have to know where we are going. "Let's go for a bike ride!" We don't have to practice, hence our common adage "It's like riding a bike!" suggesting that once we know the basics, we'll never forget. Riding a bike is letting ourselves simply feel what is needed as demanded by the ongoing force of moving. Indeed, as further evidence of my proposition that it is the ongoingness of moving that is the force of coherence, we know that riding a bike becomes easier as we "get going." We are all aware of that moment when the parent running along beside the bike gives a final gentle push and then "you're doing it! You got it! You're riding a bike." Kids often do fine at this point unless they suddenly become aware (know-that) that they are riding a bike and begin to wobble or fall. For the philosopher who wants to argue and defend "I think, therefore I ride a bike" even the use

of the phrase "ride a bike" as an example of skill is perhaps not all that adequate. This type of example clearly does not satisfy me. In fact, I can't even imagine what bike-riding principles a three-year-old would be consciously applying.

I realized that in my imagined continuum with overlappings and complexities and multiplicities, it is important to begin with gesture and end with skill mastery (more a dotted continuity than a true final achievement) yet with an intermediate set of actions that might be called "basic skill" or perhaps better avoiding the word "skill" altogether with a term like "utilitarian action." I contemplated for a while beginning with "reflex action." I considered that in a sense almost all human moving becomes in some sense, after sufficient repetition, a confident action requiring little effort to invoke and control (yet, automatic or thoughtless is not an adequate characterizations), thank goodness, yet always also available for intentional guidance or analysis.

I'll sketch the nodes or smudges or sets along this continuum, yet it is important to be clear that these are my efforts at offering words and comments to invoke complex multi-layered experiences common to most of us. I'm much more interested in granting fuzziness to the transitions along the continuum rather than in arguing for a definitive taxonomy of clearly distinguished labeled stages marked by sharp dividing lines. I'm also hopeful that this word-comprised account will not be limited to how we think or write about skill and mastery, but also how we engage the whole organism in acquiring, practicing, and living all genres of moving.

Gesture

For years I limited my understanding of gesture pretty much to thinking of it as the substitution of hand and body movements for language spoken and written and as decorating or giving emphasis to speech.[326] Both views are legitimate, if severely limited, understandings of gesture. I expanded my view of gesture as I developed an appreciation for the primacy of moving and with my growing disenchantment with meaning and

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[326] A view presented in Adam Kendon, *Gesture: Visible Action as Utterance* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

reason. In my former view, everything had to make sense, have meaning, even if it didn't engage the senses or recognize the vitality of the ungraspable ongoingness of life. I was teaching dancing and about dancing from cultures the world over at the time and sometimes I encountered the idea that dancing is gesture. I strongly rejected the connection largely, I now believe, because in my own dancing I didn't experience anything like each element of my moving body having some specifiable meaning or reason or even that the whole of my dancing could be statable in terms of an explicit meaning. I didn't feel that dancing was somehow a proxy for words. I frequently experienceed how dancing changes or expresses one's mood and emotion, yet I couldn't connect dance elements with specific emotions, nor certainly did I feel any interest in trying to do so. I felt that among the most wonderous aspects of dancing is that it resists reduction to words or message.

In my university course "Religion and Dance," I taught about the south Indian classical (to use a questionable and controversial term) dance Bharatanatyam and had friends who were accomplished Bharatanatyam dancers. They often indicated that each of the many precise movements of hand and body has explicit meanings. Indeed, the mudras, or hand gestures or poses, are named and practiced by dancers, and they can be correlated with elements of the stories that are associated with these dance dramas. Many were the occasions when I observed dancers as they stepped through a dance explaining how specific mudras illustrate aspects of the story being danced. From my outsider view, I could delight in the correlation, yet I knew full well that had I just seen the dance including these gestures, I would not be able to follow the story or to recognize how these gestures were visual illustrations of story elements. I continued to resist that dancing is comprised of gesture, with a few exceptions for highly programmatic forms of dancing, such as Bharatanatyam.

"Dance is a universal language" is a common and popular maxim. As a dancer and dance scholar I embrace the general sentiment of this statement which I'd understand as indicating something like "dancing is universally (at least widely) engaging." Yet I resisted the notion that dancing is a language and most especially that it is a language universally understood. I can

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find myself fascinated by Merce Cunningham's choreography (actually I often find it baffling or down right boring, surely a reflection of my lack of sophistication), by Japanese *butoh*, or Javanese *bedoyo*, yet, I am quite certain that any effort at my articulation of their message or meaning would be sorely lacking and especially as compared with the complexity and intricacies of these dancings in their cultural, historical, and personal contexts.

It is on these grounds that I resisted an embrace of gesture as primarily a substitute for language or for specific gestures having distinct statable meanings.

Later as I began to appreciate the primacy of self-moving, I became attuned to the existence of conventional movings that seemed to relate to identity. We know individuals in part by their patterns of moving. Even quotidian utilitarian actions such as walking often vary among cultures or even subcultures. In his classic 1936 "Techniques of Body" sociologist Marcel Mauss explored this idea suggesting that cultural, historical, and individual experience shapes these patterns of moving that might be thought of as techniques of body, or perhaps "gesture." I was immediately taken with this understanding of gesture because it severed the necessity that specific gestures have reason or meaning beyond the enacting of one's identity. It has so often been my experience in visiting folks of other cultures that when, observing some behavior, I asked them "Why do you do that?" they seem often dumbfounded and reply, "That's just what we do?" Well, yes! That is sufficient. It declares that gestures form, shape, and enact identity in various ways—social, historical, cultural, ethnic, gender, individual, and so on—in their being performed among those who share identity in some respect and do not have to be transduced into statable meanings or reasons. The very statement, "That's just what we do," indicates that the act is coherent because it is common and unquestioned, that is, it is an action experienced as of one's identity.

I eventually came to consider gesture as patterns of moving that are learned mostly unconsciously and unintentionally in the common course of maturing, growing up, and becoming a member of family, community, and culture at a particular time and place in history. Most of us are little aware of many of these gestures until we visit another community. When I visit my

African friends, we spread newspapers on the floor and sit around a common bowl eating with our hands, cooking oil often dripping from our elbows. When I visit my European friends, they often eat using both knife and fork at the same time. When I visit my Japanese friends, we eat with chopsticks. They all have their own neuromuscular programming, what I'd call synergies, that make these patterns of ordinary movement feel natural. Mauss held that there are no natural techniques, nor none that are perfect. While I concur that no gesture is natural or perfect, the constant repetition of gestures has the effect of making them feel to those who perform them as though they are of one's nature, as being just-so. I refer to this process as "gestural naturalization." While neither bowing nor shaking hands is natural to the species, either one, when practiced repeatedly in social situations, becomes *experienced as natural* by those who share the behavior as an identity marker. Our repertoire of gestures functions, at least in part, to provide a baseline standard for what we experience as coherent or incoherent.

When I lived with Navajo folks I discovered many distinctly Navajo gestures. Their doorways face east, they walk around an interior space in a sunwise (clockwise) direction, they do not make eye contact with those with whom they converse, they point with their lips, they take a long time to greet others including recitation of clan lineage, on and on. When I asked, "What does this or that mean?" they either seemed baffled or, occasionally, they might tell me a story.

Gesture, for me, indicates patterned, mostly common actions initiated without explicit intention or planning, many associated with the daily tasks of living—grooming, dressing, eating, interacting, relating to space—that are rarely explicitly taught or learned. Most are acquired through the mimetic practices of acquiring identity—gendered, cultural, family, historical, individual, and so on. Gestures are also commonly essential to negotiating effortlessly one's relationships within the group. The enactment of gesture is inseparable from the identity features that are inevitable and essential to social life. While gestures may change as we change identity factors, it is rare for gesture to be the subject of conscious efforts to improve or change them. Changes in identity factors, including gestures, occur when a young adult leaves home or when a couple marries

or decides to live together. Differences in gesture reveal differences in identity and the negotiation and adjustment of gesture is often essential to congenial living. Things as simple as how to fold a towel or how to put a roll of toilet tissue on a holder can cause considerable strife. Typically, when asked what a gesture means, the answer, if one is offered at all, is "That's just what we do."

Gesture then has very little propositional or conscious intellectual investment. Gesture becomes automatic—better, naturalized—through constant repetition, a biological process that constructs neurological synergies, programs, or macros, that are performed when activated by context. Our identities are comprised in the most basic sense of our repertoire of gestures.

Utilitarian Action

Overlapping, yet also extending, upon gesture are activities that are explicitly and electively learned, yet typically with a fairly immediate objective and a limited process of acquisition. Such activities are certainly skilled, yet not in the fuller sense I prefer to reserve for the proper use of the term "skill." I considered such references as "skill lite" and "utilitarian skill" or "basic skill," all of which are I think adequate. Yet, to give fuller emphasis to the qualities I find most fascinating regarding skill, as I will discuss and I prefer to reserve the word "skill" for what I consider as more properly skill, adopting here the term "utilitarian action."

As discussed above, I'd consider the average kid knowing how to ride a bike an example. Most kids just want to ride around the neighborhood with their friends. While some kids learn on their own, usually a brief session or two with a parent or an adult with a small amount of instruction—"push down on pedals alternating from side to side and pull this lever to stop"— is sufficient and often no more than an hour or two of practice is needed before this utilitarian action is acquired to the level of satisfaction, with no fuller skill level or instruction or practice needed. Once you can ride a bike you just ride a bike.

Skill, vaguely imagined at this point, is certainly involved in utilitarian actions, yet at a relatively low level and easily acquired. In life most of us gain basic competence in dozens of these utilitarian actions. We may learn them to participate in a social

activity such as joining a softball or basketball team with classmates or workmates. We may learn to play tennis because a friend enjoys an occasional weekend game. We may learn a new feature on a smart phone to take selfies or engage social media (or, for god's sake make a phone call!). YouTube has thousands of brief video tutorials that teach every imaginable utilitarian action. We regularly learn them when we start a new job. We've all experienced the initial training—usually no more than a day or two—that accompanies the start of a new job. Typically, only a couple of repetitions performing the action are sufficient to develop the dexterity and, often more importantly, the how-to memory to serve future performances of utilitarian actions. Years ago, when cooking breakfast with a friend she was pleased with the way I scrambled eggs. I really had never given it a thought, but she suggested that we film me cooking the eggs and post it on YouTube. I just looked this video up and after being posted for thirteen years it has nearly two million views almost all received in the first three years.[327] All these utilitarian actions take only a bit of instruction and sometimes tips for improvement are given, yet basic and sufficient competence is quickly and easily acquired.

Many utilitarian actions are learned as steps in a procedure that are often not practiced sufficiently to be remembered or to build the biomechanical synergies that lead to dexterity. Some of them do. Contemporary Western life is almost impossible to live without interfacing with a wide range of technological devices that have regular software and hardware updates. A significant amount of our lives is devoted to simply keeping up. After a software upgrade, we often must read the "what's new" section and learn how to use the new features by trying them out. When we upgrade to a new smart phone or tablet or computer or automobile, to start a very long list, we spend considerable effort on set up and learning features. Some features we will learn and never use or remember again. Some we will remember but, with

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[327] The irony is not lost on me. I'd guess that the number of those who have read any of my fifteen or so books and any of the many dozens of my published articles is mere hundreds, while a silly YT video I made showing a utilitarian action for which I had no training or expertise has millions of views and hundreds of comments.

only occasional use, must consult a tutorial, or in my case a grandchild, to remind us. Others will be regularly used to the point of them becoming performed without much conscious direction.

Utilitarian actions are often an extension of gesture and can be a mark of identity. They differ from gesture, as I am framing it, in being usually learned or acquired more explicitly and in their being identified with a distinct functional or utilitarian need. Compared with gesture, we are more conscious of utilitarian actions both in our acquiring and our using them.

Skill

While utilitarian actions can easily involve low level skill and they also can serve as an entry into processes of gaining much higher-level skill, I have wanted to distinguish skill, properly considered, as somewhat separate and distinct in a range of ways. Philosophers have sought to distinguish skill in several ways. One is in terms of three features: 1) improvability: includes training and gradations, 2) practicality: action done for some purpose, and 3) flexibility: context sensitive. Another set of criteria holds that the skilled is one who 1) is better than baseline at that activity, 2) has the skilled activity under their intentional control, and 3) maintains and/or increases her skill by way of practice.[328] These sets of criteria seem to me woefully inadequate and frankly simply uninteresting. Improvable, practical, and flexible and better, intentional, and improvable with practice seem overly banal or simply wrong, and they especially miss the most interesting and engaging aspects of skill and the process of acquiring or building skill, at least as I have experienced it, the pleasure of gaining and practicing a skill. I offer some ideas that seem more suitable and interesting to me. The following is not intended as amounting to a definition, but rather as a discussion of relevant ideas related to appreciating skill.

Moving along the continuum beginning with gesture and then utilitarian action, skill is, in my imagining it, significantly more difficult to acquire and more complex to perform. Skill is

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[328] See Chapter 27 "The Skill of Imagination" in Ellen Fridland, Carlotta Pavese (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Philosophy of Skill and Expertise* (New York: Routledge, 2001).

patterned identifiable intentional activity that requires a fully conscious and directed effort to acquire extending over a considerable period often not ending but simply ongoing or open-ended. The performance of skill activity is also consciously directed, typically in remarkably complicated ways. While utilitarian action may have a specific outcome or functional intention—taking a selfie, riding a bike, typing a text—skill is associated with and distinguished by a body of technique that is comprised of multiple, often hierarchical, fundamentals and generally surpasses a simple function or expected outcome. Certainly, some utilitarian actions may be introductions to skill or function at novice levels of skill, yet the difference I emphasize is that skill proper occurs when these actions become more than simply utilitarian, when they are recognized as based in a body of technique, when the ongoingness of acquisition is open to a long-term process of effort and improvement.

There is overlap or blurring among gesture, utilitarian action, and skill. They all involve self-moving in a repeating patterned fashion that biologically requires the formation of new sensori-motor programs, synergies, and strategies in conjunction with the neuromuscular (proprioception and kinesthesia) systems, as well as skeletal-muscular fitness and capacity. Skill is distinguished by engaging significant investment in acquisition, the centrality of technique accompanied by critical evaluation of performance, the extent of repetition and practice to gain competence and distinction, and the presence of some ideals (if generally receding as they are approached, as horizon) as to what constitutes sought-after mastery.

Utilitarian actions are acquired by watching a YouTube video, taking a class, consulting a friend, and a bit of practice. Skill is pursued by committing to long-term (often thousands of hours) highly repetitive effort under the direction of a critical mentor with the foremost goal being often simply autotelic, that is, the performance of the skill itself being sufficient motivator (while specific outcome goals and rewards are often present).

As utilitarian action is involved in job training for rather menial and relatively undemanding jobs—say a retail person or a fast-food worker—skill is more appropriate to work that constitutes a career—carpenter, plumber, electrician, mechanic, engineer, teacher, academic, surgeon, accountant. While it might

be an interesting exercise to consider if there is any importance relative to understanding skill to the degree of physicality involved in these various careers, we often choose university majors or programs based on the skills they provide us. We often see them preparing us to get jobs, as high-level job training. Many other programs are available correlating with jobs and careers we wish to pursue. We often measure our "happiness in a job" by the degree to which it is autotelic, that is, the degree to which we'd like to exercise the skill of the job no matter the pay received. I'd argue that most careers, including my own as an academic, are based in patterned movings. It used to be common to refer to PhD level academic programs as "training." One's mentors were often the models on which we charted our repeated intellectual actions and the whole style of output we imitated. For many years I resented this description, yet I've come to appreciate how relevant it, in fact, is. I treasure my mentor's criticism of my work as well as his work serving as a model to which I aspire. I even wrote an award-winning book attesting to his influence.[329]

While it is valuable and interesting to consider gesture and utilitarian action, to me these become even more engaging and insightful when seen as aspects of and in continuity with skill as I understand it. While gesture and utilitarian actions might be found in other animal species, I'll advance a likely controversial claim that skill is distinctively human. It is my core interest to focus on the understanding and appreciation of what is distinctively human. While I needn't justify my interest beyond it being what endlessly fascinates me, if pushed to state practical values I can do that. Know thyself, should include knowing thyself as a human animal among other animals in terms of both shared traits and distinctions. We are kin to all animals as "animate organisms," that is self-moving beings that are aware to some extent of moving in an environment, that is a self-other distinction. We share many other traits and capabilities with other specific animal species. However, as *Homo sapiens*, as Knowing Humans, we must have some physical and behavioral distinctions. Indeed, the very acknowledgement of and efforts

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[329] *The Proper Study of Religion: Building on Jonathan Z. Smith* (Oxford, 2021).

to articulate distinctions is surely a characteristically human-only concern. I find it fully satisfying to comprehend and appreciate the glorious capacities and distinctions of being human. There is also practical value in shaping the ongoing human interaction with other animals, that we might do so sensitively and responsibly. For me the pursuit of these aspects is more than sufficient. It is in a sense my practice of an autotelic skill of being human.

But then, as an extension of know thyself, in the rising age of technology, especially the rising issues related to Artificial Intelligence, I find that being able to comprehend the distinctively human is foundational to an understanding of this technology as well as to assessing its value and possible threats. Philosophers have considered an aspect of skill as being automatic, yet automatic implies machinic and without awareness. Intelligence, properly understood, is distinctively human and requires awareness, an "I know." The function of the word "artificial" is to signal that AI is the imitation or the simulation of human intelligence. It is a "gestural naturalization" of metaphor as actual when we begin to refer to some vague entity named "AI" as being intelligent and having skills. One major importance, if secondary to me personally,[330] to articulating skill in the way that I am imagining it, is that it should force us to consider what specific human capabilities these machines are designed to imitate, how well they do so, what are the limitations of their imitations, and how humans might best interface with AI.

Mastery

A core distinction of skill is that it is done for the satisfaction of the doing. It is autotelic, meaning that the performance experience is the intended end. Yet, skill is almost always progressive with the distinctive characteristic of opening progressively to ever greater potential rather than drawing closer to achieving some final level of perfection. Throughout my career as a teacher, I implored my students to involve themselves in some loved skill activity—and I told them I didn't think it much mattered what that activity was so long as they loved it—

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[330] I have an interest in the topic due to my writing *Religion and Technology into the Future* (2018).

and to stick with it to the point of achieving some sense of mastery. To me, mastery is not so much a specific level of accomplishment as it is a personal identity with the skilled activity and an embrace that one's potential in the performance of the skill will never be fully met. My sense is that the specific skills most worthy and satisfying are those that encourage our greatest efforts and exercise our potential to the fullest. My reasoning for pushing this advice to my students is my belief that skill is quintessentially human and without the experience of living the pursuit and practice of skill we do not fully exercise our human potential.

Mastery is something that one strives toward without any expectation of full achievement. The term "master" applies more appropriately to one who has sufficient experience to train and critique others. "Virtuoso" is a term I think most appropriate as applied to some skilled person by others rather than to oneself. Since the word is rooted in moral and character qualities, the truly virtuous person would not proclaim himself/herself to be a virtuoso. Some philosophy of skill suggests there is a correlation between the long-term practice of skill and the building of moral character, that is, to becoming a virtuous person.

It is my experience that, in our modern society characterized by a conditioned need for instant gratification and by the short-sightedness that comes with a constant barrage of information, many who are attracted to acquiring skill have unrealistic expectations. A month-long class is sometimes considered sufficient to gain mastery at some skill. Malcolm Gladwell made popular the idea that it takes ten thousand hours of practicing a skill to achieve mastery. While I prefer not to think of mastery as a specific level of achievement, I think the ten-thousand-hour idea at least serves to remind us that skill is more a way of life, or a goodly part of it, than it is a procedure to be mastered.

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Coenesthesia[331]

Coenesthesia says I by itself.
Michel Serres

Here is the story of the personal background to my asking the question, "what do we recognize as so powerful that, despite even its acknowledged irrationality and its absence of support by facts, it turns an option or a possibility into a belief or conviction, accompanied by actions and practices sometimes threatening self and others?" This question is relevant to many religious and political beliefs. My mentors at the University of Chicago were two renowned religion scholars, Mircea Eliade (1907-1986) and Jonathan Z. Smith (1937-2017). They differed on much. Based on studying their works for fifty years I believe that all their differences might be framed by how they valued difference. Eliade was a grand patternist on the order of anthropologists James George Frazer (1854-1941) and Edward B. Tylor (1832-1917) in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. These scholars sought commonality among all the diverse cultures and religions across the globe, reducing this whole chaotic mess to some common themes and symbols and patterns these scholars invented. For them difference, incongruity, and diversity were confronted as enemies, interesting to be sure, to be slain. At some level, they held, religions and cultures are all moreorless the same despite appearances. Eliade's penchant for order extended to his theory of religion—perhaps better identified as an academic theology—which held that all order came into being in the makings and shapings done by the gods in their creative acts. These acts performed in mythic times in the beginning created the foundational principles, the

very axis about which the world turns, metaphorically speaking and often symbolically represented. Humans in being religious model their lives and works on the patterns laid down by the gods and any variation is unwanted and unacceptable (sinful?). Of course, this meant Eliade was no fan of history or really even human creativity.

Jonathan Z. Smith openly opposed his colleague by asserting that difference, incongruity, even chaos were far more interesting and important than all this sameness and order. He noted how much Eliade, and his ilk, had to bend their cultural examples to fit their invented patterns. Charting the course of history is, he reminded us, telling the stories of conflict, war, strife, suffering, insurmountable issues. He reasoned that differences among people and cultures and religions were important even in simply acknowledging and honoring specific identities. Yet attending to difference raises the questions of what, if anything, all these different folks share. And it also raises the questions of category and classification and comparison. What is culture? What is religion? What is history? What is human? How can we address these questions while still treasuring differences? Invariably some sense of sameness must be introduced.

My academic career has been shaped by struggling with the opposing tensional poles forcefully argued by my academic fathers. How to honor them without patricide? Eliade clearly has been the more popular and is still read widely outside the confines of the discourse among academic specialists. Smith is credited by this academic community with defeating Eliade, yet I suspect that many who acknowledged Smith's development continued to tacitly prefer Eliade. I ask, why was Eliade's grand tale that found sameness in all difference so popular and remains so? Why did so many find Smith jarring and contentious and controversial? Since my work more closely follows Smith's, I have often been the subject of controversy and angry response. Why?

In broad terms I've asked why difference so often seems threatening and offensive. Negative responses to difference underlie racism, sexism, agism, religious discrimination and so many other arenas where difference seems threatening, leading to arguments, insults, war, discrimination, even genocide. Seems we humans strongly prefer sameness and feel threatened by

difference. I wrote a book about this issue called *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference* (2019). The question is, what makes folks so utterly devoted to their own identity factors that they are commonly willing to argue, insult, fight, and die to defend them? There is currently a scarcity of tolerance and empathy and an emboldened nastiness engaged in defending oneself and one's cohort against the threat of those who are different. My study of what distinguishes humankind, my discovery of these feelings and behaviors taking up too much real estate in myself, have urged me to try to understand this part of human nature.

Difference occupies many spaces and shapes. I, of course, welcome difference. It is at the core of metastability and nonlinearity. Difference is necessary for creativity. Difference makes encounters interesting and consequential. Appreciating difference enriches. A common way of appreciating difference is the fascination with the unusual or the exotic. What seems exotic to me is just another folk's ordinary way of living. We are fascinated with the exotic difference, if kept at a proper distance: a cultural tour or *National Geographic Magazine*. But then there are those differences that are for me much more troubling. How can one folk have members who hate and abuse and kill the folks that are different from them? Why do people willingly give up their own lives or kill other folks simply because of differences in skin color, in gender, in ethnicity, in language, in age (just to begin a very long list)? How can one political party think it is fine to kill people in the name of the state while professing their love of Jesus? I must conclude that such differences cannot be based on reason. Few arguments are ever won or minds changed based on reason or facts. This seeming rigidity must be based on some felt sense of rightness, of the unquestionable, of the just-so. If reason served as the universal arbiter of difference, if facts were accepted as facts by all (and that's what the word means isn't it?), we'd just get some really smart logicians together and they would resolve all the differences and we'd all live happily, if also perhaps a bit bored, ever after. But reason isn't the way we work. This insight forces the question of what is there about being human that urges us toward convictions, beliefs, actions not founded on reason and fact?

There is a related question. When we are confronted with a problem or situation that has many possible solutions, what grounds our decision to pursue one possibility rather than any of the others? This question is relevant to all scientific and creative work. Put technically, how does hypothetic inference work? Put familiarly, what confirms and drives the conviction of our beliefs and creativity? In folk terms, why do we make the choices we do?

I suggest the key to comprehending both questions is that our beliefs and convictions, our best guesses and most promising hypotheses, are rooted in our feelings of fitness on a continuum from incoherence to coherence. These words imply an assessment of fitness, congruence, same-ness, compatibility, rightness, yet such assessments are felt, a feeling kind of knowing, rather than based on reason or fact. Indeed, in a sense reason and fact serve to support feelings rather than the other way round. A good portion of our thinking and acting is based on what feels right or just-so. Reason and facts become relevant to assist in justifying or explaining ourselves to those who disagree or threaten us or who we wish to influence. More publicly and formally, reason and fact serve to test hypotheses, but not so much in coming up with them. Reason and fact are properties of induction and deduction, but not so much abduction, to use Charles Sanders Peirce's term for hypothetic inference.

This explanation feels right, doesn't it? Now can I just accept differences among folks and stop calling by nasty names those with whom I don't agree? Likely not, but I can try. I might be able to feel slightly guilty when I misbehave. Now perhaps I can put the experience of incongruity identified as *surprise* to work to help me settle on a hypothesis, or to be creative.[332] But then I'm left seeking an understanding of this seemingly mysterious power within human beings that gives us such confidence and conviction regarding feelings of coherence/

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[332] This is the foundation for creativity I find developed by the classic works of the nineteenth and early twentieth century American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914). See my "To Risk Meaning Nothing: Charles Sanders Peirce and the Logic of Discovery," in *Creative Encounters, Appreciating Difference*.

incoherence. It can (I reason!) only be something powerfully associated with life and vitality and one's very identity. Since belief and ideology and conviction are based on how we feel, surely the source of conviction cannot be a belief or an ideology, at least initially, although across time the influence likely goes both directions. The very meaning of the terms belief and ideology includes the acknowledgement that they are expected to be challenged even dismissed by others. We don't call factual certainty belief. My beliefs are often not your beliefs. Belief inherently acknowledges difference, at least its possibility. We find ourselves often called upon to test our belief, our faith, our convictions. Such tests often infer holding steadfast in the presence of refuting reason and fact. There must be some foundation that is felt with such certainty as to defy even the idea of challenge. I'm awkwardly asking the question that we often don't ask. Too naïve I suppose. Why, for all humans, do the feelings that shape our identities vary in the terms of feelings of fitness, coherence, rightness, the just-so?

This concern is where my understanding and experience related to moving become relevant. I have come to appreciate that moving is life in process. We come to life and are born moving. Moving is living. Movement, the term more commonly used, is analyzable event. Yet moving—as its very distinction is being in no place—is difficult to grasp (gasp!). Yet, the study of the biomechanics of moving, in process, offers some insight. Proprioception, occurring throughout the body in muscles and joints, assesses and senses moving as it is moving and constantly tweaks our movings by excitations and inhibitions to achieve as much as possible ongoing safe, balanced, efficient, smooth moving and to avoid injury. This principle isn't choice, it is biology. It also has a feeling component, kinesthesia, that gives us an awareness, if in varying degrees, of the quality of our movings, that is, smooth/jerky, easy/labored, coherent/ incoherent. The ever-present sense of ourselves in terms of the qualities of our moving is built into our biology, Bernstein's Law of Smoothness. Proprioception (Latin *proprius* "one's own" plus *reception*) means self-perception, sensing oneself, feeling one's own living. Kinesthesia (Greek *kinein* "to move" plus *aesthesis* "sensation"), literally moving sensation, is the sensing of the quality of moving and moving encounters. Some argue it is an

additional or sixth sense rightfully placed among seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling, and touching which it is perhaps most like. Since moving is living, this makes sense.

Synergies and groups of synergies (schemas) are the biomechanical subroutines that combine specific movement elements to simplify complex moving patterns, think gestures and skills. It isn't surprising that the biological principle functioning here to create simplicity (coherence, smoothness) among the highly complex is the same Law of Smoothness. The miracle of kinesthesis makes available feelings that are located not only in various moving body parts but also generalized for the whole moving body. It is a general and common feeling but possible also to localize.

My proposition is that the convictions and beliefs we hold so strongly as to defy logic and facts, if necessary, and that may commit us to putting life and limb at risk are grounded on this common feeling produced by kinesthesia, understood broadly. So also do those decisive moments when we just seem to know the promise of one possibility among many choices—a creative idea, a likely solution to a problem. The quality of these feelings is charted on a continuum of smoothness to jerkiness, correlating with coherence/incoherence, easy/labored. Kinesthesia provides such a powerful base because these feelings are inseparable from our very life, our vitality, our existence. The importance of my insistence on the distinction of moving and movement is especially significant here because as kinesthesia produces the feelings of our moving, they are not reflective or distanced from us, they are not the result of calculation or reason, they are our life feelings, awareness of our very vitality or aliveness. Kinesthesia, spanning the continuum from incoherence to coherence, is the qualitative feeling awareness of our own life force. What we feel is inseparable from the certainty that we exist, that we be, that we are alive.[333] No argument or

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[333] A caveat. Of course, the many sensory elements in the entire sensorium along with sensations of pain associated with injury or pathology complement kinesthesia. Yet, from antiquity many have mused about the sense of ownership that is associated with the biology of sensing. It is not that something is seen with the eyes and is available as a visual image, it is that the seeing, as with all other senses, is *my* seeing and I know this because there is somehow a common sense

fact offered can even be considered that might refute this kind of knowing. I propose feeling confidence and conviction about a proposition or idea or hypothesis is due to it having the same qualities as the feelings of kinesthesia. Belief and conviction have more to do with feeling experience on the model of kinesthesia than with the reason or facts of the content.

Likely my proposition seems a bit grandiose given that we commonly understand kinesthesia as the rather specific "awareness of position and movement of the parts of the body by means of sensory organs (proprioceptors) in the muscles and joints." Can I really argue that the biomechanical capability to successfully scratch my ear and be aware I'm doing so has a biologically based philosophical function as highfalutin as grounding belief and conviction? Remarkably there is a history of pondering the existence and nature of these feelings that dates from the time of Aristotle (384-322 B.C.E). Following the creative work of Daniel Heller-Roazen in his *The Inner Touch: Archaeology of Sensation* (2009), I enjoy labeling this common sense, this inner touch, with the word "coenesthesia" (Latin *coen-* "common" plus *esthesia, esthesis* "sensation"), common sense (but not in the use made famous by Thomas Paine).

The term "coenesthesia" came about as the title of a 1794 doctoral dissertation at the University of Halle by Christian Friedrich Hübner. Translated from Latin to German shortly thereafter it gained interest in the fields of medicine, philosophy, and physiology. It is this breadth of interest that appeals to me. Heller-Roazen's account locates this work in the longer history of "the shared faculty of sensation" or "the common sense" as he identified it. In *De Anima*, Aristotle discussed *koinon aistheterion* or common sense. Heller-Roazen thinks that Aristotle

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about the very act of biological sensing itself. Pain is a particularly interesting example. We have a poor vocabulary to describe various kinds of pain, yet many of those terms correspond with the kinesthetic continuum smooth/jerky, such as sharp, jabbing, piercing, dull. Physicians ask adults to rate pain on a scale of one to ten, kids on a scale of smiley face to frowny face. When we have a toothache or earache, it is pain that is *mine* without question. The only way we can feel another's pain, our empathetic capacity regarding pain, is to recall a time when we had a similar pain, but memory of pain is nothing like the pain experienced.

might have been concerned principally with the unusual neuro-logical psychological condition of synesthesia where perceptual signals from one sense are mixed or replaced by those of another, that is, where smells give color sensations. Heller-Roazen feels Aristotle's concern, that might also be referred to as synesthesia, was more likely the philosophical acknowledge-ment of a master power that perceives the fact of perception common to various senses. I suppose this concern seems a bit odd at first, but it is to me rather awesome and is certainly an aspect of what I understand as distinctively human. To me, there are two ways of thinking about it. When we sense the world, we do not sense it as a bunch of independent sensory signals (shape, aroma, color, mass, etc.) that we then must process one by one or that we somehow need to integrate so we might sense say a flower. Rather our senses are synesthetic in that we sense a flower all at once with all our senses, although we are also able to separate the various sensory aspects. We sense the whole flower, yet we can smell a flower or attend to its color. The second way that seems rather splendid to me is that we sense a commonness among all seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, tasting, that is we have a common experience of sensation, and that this sensation is somehow inseparable from who we are. There is a commonness in the experience of the various senses. That's why we gather them in the category senses. We can experience, as a common sense, the perception of perceiving as an act of being oneself. This, perhaps seemingly odd philoso-phical concern, has been a common concern from the time of Aristotle being pursued by physiology, medicine, neurology, and philosophy. Across the centuries many terms have been advanced. My collection of these terms includes common sensation, common feeling, inner touch, vital force, general feeling, inner sense, vital sense, vital feeling, feeling sense, general sensation, self-feeling, life feeling, the tonality of the sensitive nerves, elan, the consciousness of our sensory condition, general sensibility, and the complex of all sensations. In the nineteenth century with the development of medical science this common sense was associated also with pain and other general body sensations like shivering and itching. Physiologist and neurologist H. Charlton Bastian (1837-1915), interested in movings and coordination of limbs discussed what

he called "muscular sense," the likely origin of our common term "muscle memory," that he proposed registered the body moving and at rest for which he coined the term kinaesthesis. His younger contemporary, the renowned neuroscientist, winner of the Nobel in Physiology and Medicine in 1932, Sir Charles Sherrington (1857-1952), later called it proprioception which he understood as "our secret sense, our sixth sense."

Given that for over two millennia there has been persistent philosophical and biological attention given to what we now might, based properly in biology, understand as proprioception and its general sensory aspect kinesthesia, I find it strange that today it seems rarely considered in philosophy. I find that in the public, even among my academic colleagues in the humanities, proprioception is a relatively unknown word. For those who include a discussion of muscle memory or common sense or movement, while the terms proprioception and kinesthesia may be occasionally used, I have yet to find any examples. that include even a general exploration of the actual neurophysiology involved.

There are practical gains earned by digesting this somewhat tedious discourse. First, in a world that seems overwhelmed by division and irreconcilable differences that is often characterized by nasty demeanor and outright war, it is somewhat consoling to me to understand that convictions and beliefs held so powerfully are not ultimately based on reason and fact, but on the situational context that produces feelings of rightness or givenness, coherence. While I am not happy that I feel helpless to change others, while I am no less angered and disgusted by those who seem to understand reality so differently than I do, I can at least take some measure of solace and the hope of a shred of empathy in knowing that the power of belief and conviction is a part of what makes us so distinctive as human beings. Our animal kin may eat one another, but they don't call those different from them nasty names. The positive side of my proposition helps us understand such things as patriotism, love of country, rooting for the home team, loving one's family members even if they are nasty people, believing in our own god not those gods of our neighbors, even having our own distinctive tastes.

Living our own gestures, practicing our own skills, feeling our own moving bodies is how we be who we are. Knowing how fundamental and pervasive are these movings, encourages me to attend carefully to the exercise and maintenance and practice of my own movings, however banal. The results are felt in their kinesthetic quality. The more skilled and practiced our movings, it seems the smoother and easier and more confidently we experience our vital force.

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Paean to Being Human[334]

"You know this whole thing (the cosmos? nature? existence?) just may not be about us (humans?)." For decades I've heard this adage. I've always felt I was supposed to agree. I'm sure that occasionally I've responded with a tentative tiny nod. Yet my heart has always screamed in silent protest. I'm kind of in awe of being human. I totally get it. The maxim is of the contemporary critique of the ongoing limitations and ills of Enlightenment humanism. We must see ourselves as part of the larger universe, kinfolk with animals, interdependent with plants, inseparable from the health of the earth. We should be humbler regarding our roles and responsibilities across the board. A currently energized field of philosophy posits a posthuman world although so far as I can tell they really don't mean a world without humans, and they are vague about what might constitute a posthuman. This posthuman philosophy is informed by their sense of the importance of creating an alternative to humanism and by the necessity of meeting the challenges of the rapid development of AI/robotics on a supposed path to surpass or replace humans. It is arrogant to feel that everything is about us humans. Yes, I get it. Yet, take us humans out of existence and I can't comprehend anything at all really. I am certain this is anthropocentrism and perhaps carries some of the pitfalls of humanism, yet how to even contemplate anything being "about anything" without the distinctively human capacity to ask the simple, "so?" Even calling out the dangers of anthropocentrism or imagining a posthuman world requires human self-awareness and critical intelligence. Cows don't discuss bovino-centrism!

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[334] Published in *On Moving* (2022, 2023).

For decades the core of my life has been dancing always joined with music. My immersion in both dancing and constantly reflecting on the wonders involved in the human bodied capacity to dance and sing have allowed me to focus not on the limitations of being human but rather on the vast near incomeprehensible capabilities and potentialities of what distinguishes being human. Consequently, to dismiss being human, either because of some historical philosophical program or because of some imagined superiority of some electromechanical synth, is just plain nonsense to me. How can a new song be about or affect anything without the human ears to hear it, to hear it knowing it as song? How can concepts such as existence, cosmos, or universe—some final container, an inside that has no outside—be anything but impossibles given that inside/outside are corporeal concepts and thus arise from our self-moving human bodies? How can we have any intimation of other, beyond, the spiritual or indeed god, without the most common faculties that distinguish being human?

We might understand that cows go "moo" and chickens go "cluck" and dogs go "bow wow" and that they hear and respond that these are their songs. We record and marvel at whale songs. Yet it is pretty hard for me to think that these animals recognize and contemplate metaphysical and theological or aesthetic dimensions of their songs, much less emotional ones, or that some few of them are inspired to create themes and variations on "moo moo" or "cluck cluck." Ponies don't pen poems; cows don't contemplate cosmos (cowsmos?). Without the inspiration or the biological human bodies in which songs move and inspire and enthrall, then what? In the large frame through almost all the existence of the cosmos, time and space as the physicists account for it, there were not animals or any life at all, just rocks and gas moving through space, heat and cold beyond comprehendsion. Imagining the whole of the cosmos in prehuman terms, or, I'm quickly led to ask, why not endless numbers of universes? Not only our solar system, not only our Milky Way Galaxy, not only our galactic super cluster Laniakea, but our whole cosmos comprised of two trillion galaxies might just as well be but a grain of sand on an endless beach of universes. Without human reckoning, without anyone to even gasp, "Oh Wow!" how can there be any sense of inside/outside, any

measure, any limit or not? We account for cosmic time and space in terms of the duration of our own Earth year, rarely considering that, in the really big context, our solar system arrived on the scene in the last tiny moment. The speed of light was not confidently known until the 1860s which was roughly when the term "lightyear" appeared. Would it be any different to measure time in terms of the duration of the birth, expansion, and contraction of our universe, say as the unit we now refer to as a lightyear? If "it" is really not about us, then why not reckon time in "amoeba lifetimes" or the period of the sun's existence? If we are not relevant, then isn't it just all matter (and energy) that doesn't matter, because mattering requires humans? Humans sing and play music and dance to express and construct and celebrate who they are. While all humans share common biology, each human's body is marked, made distinct, by its own individual physicality and shaped by its encounters with its environment. The differences are essential to the harmonics of sound and moving.

Why not drop fleshy biological bodies and embrace the artificial intelligent synths (androids) as viable posthumans? Yes, I know, AIs can write music and poetry and a whole lot of other things, and they are amazing at sciency stuff. But let's be clear. The "A" stands for "artificial" thus indicating that what they output that looks like real human intelligence is actually the product of cold calculating machines that simulate human intelligence. The very notion intelligence is human. These machines don't create music because they love it, because they are inspired by lost love and life, or for the pleasure of other AIs. In Mali, near Dogon I watched a line of garden workers, each with a hoe all chopping together, all singing as they worked. In Bamako I went to a smithy where many workers sweated by their forges a dozen hours a day pounding out mesmerizing rhythms and counter rhythms. In the remote village Zambogou I watched and listened at the door of a grain shed where the women harmonized as they pounded millet. In Bamako with my Mali friends, we danced and sang and played music and joked and laughed every day after eating lunch. If you put a bunch of AIs in a room to work, the best you could hope for is a power hum. AIs don't take music lessons as kids being required to practice before they go out to play. They don't play in grade

school bands or later spend all their spare time in a friend's garage passionately playing loud music. AIs don't write love songs when the AI next to them broke their CPU or about a discontinued motherboard or a dying battery. AIs don't learn to play with lip and finger beautiful, gorgeous instruments each of which has its own personality often made by the skilled loving hands of others bearing generations of craft skill. AIs don't hear music with sensitive ears or feel sad if they lose their hearing. They don't feel the base rhythm in their chests. What AIs can do is take vast amounts of digitized music samples marked (by humans) as the best music ever created and based on algorithms calculate probabilities of what constitutes the parameters of their input. These probabilities can be used, if a human directs the AI to do so, to chart sequences of notes. Random generators are incorporated to provide the illusion of novelty and the unanticipated. AIs can make musical scores and machines can electronically synthesize the sounds. Indeed, some symphony orchestras with human musicians have played this music. Yet, never forget, AIs don't get inspired to create music. They don't suffer writer's block. Artificial Intelligent music is data output from cold calculation.

Perhaps it's time we had an anthem that celebrates and honors being human. A melody that reminds us that we can not only hear, but we can also dance. Of course, all human singings and dancings already do this. Perhaps we need a theory of harmony inseparable from the ongoing moving of human bodies. Since there is no singing or dancing without moving human bodies perhaps it is the dancing singing body that best intones a fitting paean to human distinctiveness. Maybe I'm an aesthetic humanist.

Pythagoras (570-500? BCE), credited with the first theory of harmony, hearing rhythmic hammering followed his ears into the forge as "if impelled by a kind of divine will." We might imagine that Pythagoras danced to the hammered rhythms he heard. He also heard melody. Yet he could only imagine harmony as comprised of divinely set perfect chords represented only by a sequence of integers, the mathematical harmonics of whole numbers. And in trying to replicate the divine scheme Pythagoras had to ignore his own ears, perhaps also his own toe-tapping feet, as well as the fifth hammer that was part of the

melodic rhythm that compelled him into the smithy. Centuries later, Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) theorized harmony based on his understanding of the purity of geometry. He modeled his theory of harmony on nested perfect three-dimensional geometrical forms centered on the sun, the correspondence of sound with the solar system and orbiting planets. The result, a sun-centered harmony, that only god—imagined, where else if not the center of the heavens as the sun?—could hear. Again, ears continued to go wanting.

Beginning in the time of Kepler, the world has steadily shifted toward the present imagined posthuman theory of harmony. Andreas Vesalius' publication of *On the Fabric of the Human Body* in 1543 opened, quite literally, the body in all its complexity to anatomical study in service to knowledge accompanied by shifts in medical treatment toward a modern scientific basis. In this lineage, the body is normalized and reduced to precise and exacting measures. Advancing technologies, for example electronic scanning technologies, as Katherine Hayles wrote in her 1999 book *How We Became Posthuman*, "create a normalized construct averaged for many data points to give an idealized version of the object" (196). The body becomes an idealized and normalized form; the body becomes wholly representable by information. A common observation of medicine is that the body is seen and treated as normalized object, as information presented as lab test results and scans, with the often-accompanying impersonal and insensitive treatment. Variations from "normal" are the focus for the diagnosis of pathology. Where is this development heading? We might imagine this harmony as some wholly debodied cloud of information, the ethereal specularity of the Aurora Borealis or the simple purity of zeroes and ones. Perhaps finally we have achieved the great celestial melody wholly abstract, wholly transcendent, no longer bearing any taint of the fragile and weak human body; music finally freed of the variations of handcrafted musical instruments. The great information patterns singing as a heavenly host free at last of Pythagoras's annoying fifth hammers and Kepler's disturbing "unsettling parts." The great algorithms of The All reject nothing. The map has become the territory. Reality and divinity are but informational imitations of

one another. We have but Bit (binary digital) Reality, Bit Music, free at last of sweaty dancing bodies.

Where is the ear to hear? Who does the resounding inspire? Do algorithms weep? Or laugh? Dare we suggest that god might be found (imagined) in hearing the singing ongoing, in the discord of the fifth hammer, in the marvel of the unreliable ear, in the variations among the violins, in the bloody mucusy unsettling parts? What irony the ear in the era of Bit Reality; and the feet where the cloud is the ground. What becomes of the alpinist? The dancer?

France's King Louis XIV (1638-1715) understood. He fashioned himself as the Sun King thus placing himself at the center of the solar system (universe!) where he could not only hear the geometric harmonies, but also dance them. In the early days of ballet, a dance taught in his court, Louis danced the role of Apollo the sun god assigned the daily task of harnessing his chariot to carry the sun across the sky. Apollo is also the god of music and dance. In his dancing Apollo, King Louis constructed himself, in the copresence of court and cosmos, as the divine king; the patterns of dancing and music were the harmonics of his court and his kingdom and his world. The long history of ballet continues this tradition. Perhaps its grand vision is why so many refer to ballet as "*the* dance." Ballet is at once the apex of sheer physical mastery of moving human bodies as well as being transcendent, barely connected to earth (*en pointe*). Until recently the Ashanti in Ghana selected their royalty based on their ability to dance. How such selection criteria might transform Western politics! It would surely save the world and the planet. In Hinduism Nataraja, the Lord of Dance, danced the world into existence. Today dancing marks life; ballet, perfection. So too the alpinist, the gymnast, the musician, the violin maker (luthier); all skilled coordinated collections of ears and feet and fingers.

Though it was but a thought experiment Étienne Bonnot de Condillac (1714-1780) heard the melody of the moving body. His puzzle was to imagine a man [sic], a stone man, a stone man equipped as is any man with the capacities to feel and perceive and think, but for his being rigid, that is, comprised of stone. The thought experiment was then to consider what would need to occur for this flying stone man to come to sentience, to an awareness of himself and the world? Condillac's insight was that

this man would need but a moveable arm that he might touch himself. In the moving touching connection, hand moving to touch body, there arises awareness, sentience, and self. The hand feels the body as object; the hand is felt to be an integral part of body; the copresence of self and other, object and subject. The near synonymy of touching and moving awakens the senses and the awareness of self and world. Touching and moving open the ears and warm the body. A few decades later François-Pierre-Gonthier Maine de Biran (1766-1824) simplified Condillac's insight and foreshadowed the discovery of proprioception by realizing that this creature would not even need touch himself, he would need only move his hand. There is feeling associated with self-moving; an "inner touch" as Daniel Heller-Roazen termed it or kinesthesia. One wonders what sort of body moving this thought experiment might have produced had, like Pygmalion, the philosophers imagined themselves in the presence of a lovely stone woman. Galatea was quickened by the warm touch of Pygmalion's lips.

In the posthuman rise of information to replace body and world, I think it is urgent that we hear and act to develop a contemporary harmony, one fitting our current needs. It must be a harmony of body; songs singing, dances dancing. Hayles, writing on posthumanism still opts for bodied human beings. She contrasts body, by which she means this normalized reduction to the body universal, with embodiment, by which she directs our attention to the individual lived body.[335] Embodiment, or as I prefer "being bodied," considers the aspects of body that are inherently performative, active, and improvisational (Hayles, 197). Hayles makes a distinction quite like that between movement as backfilled (Bergson) and living movement (Barbaras), what I call "self-moving." She quotes Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "Eye and Mind" essay to help make the distinction. The body is, Merleau-Ponty wrote, not "a chunk

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[335] N. Katherine Hayles, who charts the advent of posthumanism, distinguishes the terms body and embody. I am sympathetic to Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's observation that the verb form embody suggests that the base condition is to be without body, as mind or soul perhaps. I often prefer simply to use body as a verb formed by context (even if it may not always work perfectly), yet with that caveat I can consider the important distinction Hayles makes.

of space or a bundle of functions" but "an inter-twining of vision and movement" (quoted in Hayles, 203). Or as Elizabeth Grosz wrote in *Volatile Bodies*, "there is no body as such; there are *only bodies*—male or female, black, brown, white, large or small—and the gradations in between" (quoted in Hayles, 196). While I believe much can be gained by considering basic common human biology, it is essential in considering human distinctiveness to appreciate that every body is someone's body and every body is necessarily one defined in some sense by a particular place and time. Body is always in context, gesturing, individuating, responsive, and with agency. It seems odd that despite us all constantly experiencing the distinctive qualities of bodies, the normalized body has so deeply influenced us. How common it is now to think we need consult our biometrics rather than our feelings to determine our own health and fitness (I'm often obsessed with this process that, for me, involves multiple devices); our feeling moving body is frequently secondary to our informational body, a body comprised not of flesh but of numbers. Since Pythagoras it seems we prefer numbers to feet and fingers and ears and lips.

Hayles parallels the distinction between body and embody-ment with the contrast between what she terms "inscription" and "incorporation." The implications are obvious in the terms themselves, one based on writing, and one based on corporeal-ity. Inscription is associated with the informationalization that constitutes the normalized body. It is the algorithmic crunching of data to calculate the parameters of the normal body—the medical body, the social body, the political body, the commercial body. The individual body becomes but a tagged data set used for marketing and social networking and diagnosis. Incorpor-ation is the body in its moving and gesturing specificity that is coincident with the corporeal concepts that correlate with the distinctiveness of body morphology and biology; distinctive both as having arms and legs and fronts and backs and as brown or white, as young or aged, as short or tall, as variously abled, as cultured and located in history and geography. Inscription is the formation from the outside based on collective expectations whereas incorporation is the formation of routinized gestured felt experience. Elizabeth Grosz understood these categories as polar, rather than as exclusive, positions in a field of interaction;

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as mobiatic rather than separate and distinct alternatives. I see them as energized by the dynamics of an aesthetic of impossibles.

These distinctions may inspire a new understanding of harmony. Since the sixteenth century the trajectory has been toward the normalized body, the information body, the Bit Reality body; a trajectory that is madly accelerating today. The harmony associated with the normalized body is one of calculation and probability and data ranges, perhaps novel in the short term, yet increasingly bland and predictable as its own output progressively becomes its only input. Like the normalize-ed body of medicine, variation beyond defined ranges tends to signal pathology.[336] All becomes inscription, and the body no longer sings, it just registers and emits. The new harmony must protect the precious moving living singing dancing body, the experience of volatile improvisational bodies moving unpredictably through space and time. Confined to body yet transcendent. Fleshy bodies bellow and moan, cry out in pain, screech in frustration, laugh with joy, and sing and dance—all incorporations (in-bodyations) in the new harmony, the harmony including all the variations of moving sensing experiencing living bodies.

The late French philosopher Michel Serres (1930-2019) is an exception among philosophers in including the living active body throughout his writing, often invoking his personal experience as a seaman and hiker (alpinist). He hears harmony as a moving body. His writing style sings the body poetic perhaps more so even than its content. I have acknowledged that had I to choose but one book I might have if deserted on an island it would be Serres' *Variations on the Body*. My copy has been read so many times all the pages have fallen out. Throughout much of the first section "Metamorphosis" of his *Variations* he regularly refers to the upright walker in recognition of the long history of the evolution of humankind leading to our distinctive upright posture.

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[336] I have found that medical specialists, while relying on these numbers and making life and death decisions on their merits, fully admit that the variations, complexities, random elements, and unknowns are expected to trump the numbers time and time again.

You recognize the alpinist, that man who knows how to walk, by his risen body. Standing erect is therefore acquired and has more to do with the ear—no doubt, but also the entire body and pleasure—than the eye. At the same time as learning to walk over steep, difficult, capricious grounds, you must learn to find your seat there; then and then only, when all the skin of the foot sends the entire body a hundred delectable messages of velvet, wool and silken comfort, do you learn how one becomes hominin, banishing from yourself the univalve, the quadruped and the ape—an erect animal, a risen child, an adult person expelling everything that remains infantile. Leaving childhood and the animal, what joy at last: the body gets its kicks (26).

The risen body, both the evolution from snail and quadruped as well as the rise from the creeping infant to the upright walking adult, invokes an awakening of the ear (the location of our organ of balance) and the feet, the marvel of human feelings of joy and the pleasure of touch. Serres reminds of the journey from the foot stomach that is mollusk through various rising modes of motility to the erect posture of hominin where the body both literally and figuratively gets its kick. Moving is touching is feeling is experiencing is human. To Serres this rising is experienced as body resounding with world; an adumbration of the new harmony we seek.

Sustained, this unheard of song rises from the body, in the grip of rhythmic movement—heart, breath and regularity—and seems to emerge from the receptors of the muscles and joints, in sum, from the sense of the gestures and movement, invading the body first, then the environment, with a harmony which celebrates its grandeur, adapting to it the very body which emits it, then abounds in it, filled. Taciturn since the beginning of the world, the earth and sky, the cold shadow and the mauve predawn light strewing with pink the ice corridors and needles of rock, together sing the glory. Daylight spreads through the enormous volume. I hear the divine invading the Universe (10).

The journey from integers to the heliocentric harmony of geometrics arrives at long last back to the very ears Pythagoras

ignored and to the body comprised of beating heart and breathing lungs and moving muscles. Song arises from the rhythms of gesturings and movings, from the alpinist and the gymnast and the dancer. Song fills the environment expanding outward in celebration of the earth and sky. In the song of the body, one hears the divine presence of the universe. Serres suggests we must listen to the living body sing that we may hear the voice of god.

Standing balance is considered by Serres in a passage that inspires the terms of a new harmony—the dynamics of physiological tonus. Standing balance, Serres writes, is

> not stable, but unstable, better still, metastable, invariant through variations, this equilibrium is constructed like a refuge or a habitat, composed like a musical score, over fragile epicycles or miniscule rapid ellipses, planned cams, minor stumblings recovered from, differentials of angles or of deviations quickly returned to the peace of the smooth and even, a sloped roof but, in all, flat ... arrhythmia and prosody, even and odd, anharmonic seventh cord resolved, mixed consonance and dissonance, disquieted calls followed by thundering responses ... these are the wonderful cycles of reciprocal support between the labyrinth of the inner ear, charged with bearing, and the spiral volutes of the external ear, which hears and produces music, converging in a black and secret center, common to both these networks, where I suddenly discovered the solution to the dark mysteries of the union of the soul that hears language and the bearing body ... disquieted experience, certainly, since the second word of this phrase designates, as does existence, a deviation from equilibrium, yes, destabilization followed by ecstasy, and since the first word expresses yet another deviation from quietude, yes, infinitesimals of exaltation—oh, our primordial elations, our delicate delectations! After the musical offertory hymn, might the Word itself have arisen from the uprightness, disquiet and quiet, of the flesh! (27-28).

Serres reminds us that the ear is present in standing balance as well as harmonics. The metastabilities of the interaction of nerve and muscle is a fragile tension among competing interests

never resolved yet always dynamic in its sought-after coherence. Standing balance is not static, but a chaos of competing biomechanical forces and interests impossible to resolve to stillness, to immobility, yet it engages, Serres notes, the "dark mysteries of the union of the soul that hears language and the bearing body." In physiology this is often referred to using the musical term "tonus," the dynamics of balance not as fixed position, but as the oscillatory oppositional dynamics of living flesh, as of sounding music. Tonus is a factor both of physio-logical architecture—for example, muscles occur in oppositional pairs, the literal entwining of nerve and muscle in proprio-ceptors, the copresence of inhibitory and excitatory proprio-ceptors—as well as in energetics—that is, tonus correlates with the dynamic readiness and engagement of muscles.

Serres does not confine this musical score to the body; he suggests that the Word (capitalized perhaps in allusion to John 1:1 that he inverts) of god itself may have arisen from the flesh understood deeply in terms of the ear's involvement in standing balance and in song. The implication of this new harmonics is that the Word is not the stable unchanging presence of the perfect god, but it is the Word made flesh—or better, human flesh made Word—that is the unresolvable dynamics of an aesthetic of impossibles, including discord and dissonance and the constant presence of the imbalance (falling, the Fall) and incoherence (chaos, Sin) as essential to the energetics of living flesh. This harmony reverses the Pythagorean "idea" that god's purity comes first, and the imperfect human ear and feet are not to be trusted despite their affect and thus in a sense they are inexplicable degradations of perfection. It also offers a reinter-pretation of the phrase "in the beginning was the Word." Inspired by Merleau-Ponty we might suggest, "in the beginning was flesh and from the moving flesh came the word and god." Achieving upright posture and standing balance attests the harmony of the Word, an arising from moving flesh that marked the beginning.

A deep appreciation for the song of moving body and its resounding throughout the universe is found in the late French philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy's 2007 book, *Listening.* Nancy (1940-2021) proposes a "fundamental resonance, even around resonance as a foundation, as a first or last profundity of 'sense'

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itself (or of truth)" (6). For Nancy, listening is the tense and attentive mode of hearing requiring a sense of anticipation, an emerging, an almost thereness. In a sense listening indicates foreknowledge or its conditions. Rather than passively hearing, listening is directed and focused and shaped by anticipation and expectation of coherence or, in the vernacular of sound, of sonority or resonance. Rather than itself being of meaning or coherence, sound reveals shape or form or coherence by its resonance, by its interaction with the vessel it fills or the environs by which its movings and reverberatings are shaped. It fills space and time responding to containment and objects encountered by reshaping itself, its tones and rhythms, as it folds back on and harmonizes with itself. Resonators are chambers or oscillators, themselves not sound, but the shapers and enablers of the sonority essential to sound. Sound *re*-sounds and *re*-sonates, with emphasis on the fold of "re." Sound resounds only in encounter.

Inspired by Nancy, we may appreciate that the moving body is an encounter with itself, its nerves and muscles and bones rhythmically interacting in the harmonies and dissonances, the toned bodying, of life. Yet, the living body moves about in encounter with the environment that also serves as a resonating vessel, or nested set of vessels, that amplifies and harmonizes our thrashings about. It is the disruptions of the expected as much as the coherences felt that create the song; a melody comprised of folding and refolding and evolving rhythms and melodies. The sense of the whole (*holos*) is, as Nancy reminds, evident in the remarkable foreknowledge that seems a necessary aspect of listening, suggesting or promising such values as truth or at least beauty.

Since being and moving are inseparable from transitivity, Nancy asks, "shouldn't truth 'itself,' as transitivity and incessant transition of coming and going, be listened to rather than seen? But isn't it also the way that it stops being 'itself" and identifiable and becomes no longer the naked figure emerging from the cistern but the resonance of that cistern—or, if it were possible to express it thus, the echo of the naked figure in the open depths?" (4).

"The echo of the naked figure in the open depths." The shift Nancy suggests is fundamental and particularly appropriate to

our current harmonic constructions. Truth, as the resonance shaped by the cistern, is process always unfolding, an echoing of the naked, rather than something static and objective. Rather than integers and geometrical figures and AI probabilities, truth is song being sung, always becoming something other yet an other always anticipated, made possible only through resonating interaction; a process of ear (balance and sound) rather than an object seen (fixed) with the eye. Song is always new, always novel, yet always in some sense already known, always an ongoing recognition.

Truth is in the echoing.[337] We hear our own song, our voice, through echoes; the resounding in our skull as well as in our world. As we know self by encounter with other; this other can be not only the touch of hand or the inner touch of proprio-ceptively felt movings (the othering that is the mark of our dancing), but also the echoing of our own singing. When we listen to our own song, we experience that the time of sonority is not the same as the linear regular sequence of virtual points, the knife-edged demarcations of transition that is common to the linear scientific time where duration has zero measure indeed no place at all other than as backfilled. We hear our song—sonorous, echoing, resounding—as a harmonic copresence, heard and felt as the play of coherence and incoherence. Reverberate, resonate, resound, echo—they all explore and reveal the cistern that is primordiality, the deep well of history from which our being and awareness emerge.[338] Sound surrounds and penetrates and returns; sound is without and within, and thus fills space and in its filling reveals its character, quality, and truth. Sound is an aesthetic of impossibles.

When we model truth on sight, the elimination of duration brings clarity. We can snap a picture and indeed the closer we get to a zero interval of exposure, the knife-edge of pure time as linear succession, the more accurate we usually consider the image (Instagram is truth). Yet if we model truth on sound then the approach based on the visual leaves truth empty, a song that

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[337] Massumi also discusses "echo" in *Parables*.

[338] Henri Bergson's notion of *elan vitale* corresponds with reverberation as inspired for him by Eugene Minkowski. See Gaston Bachelard, *Poetics of Space*, xxv-xxvii.

is the sound of silence. Truth too must sing and dance. Nancy put it this way.

> Its [sound's] present is thus not the instant of philosophico-scientific time either, the point of no dimension, the strict negativity in which that mathematical time has always consisted. But sonorous time takes place immediately according to a completely different dimension, which is not that of simple succession (corollary of the negative instant). It is a present in waves on a swell, not in a point on a line; it is time that opens up, that is hollowed out, that is enlarged or ramified, that envelops or separates, that becomes or is turned into a loop, that stretches out or contracts, and so on.
>
> The sonorous present is the result of space-time: it spreads through space, or rather opens a space that is its own, the very spreading out of its resonance, its expansion and its reverberation. This space is immediately omnidirectional and transversate through all spaces: the expansion of sound through obstacles, its property of penetration and ubiquity, has always been noted (13).

Nancy describes here what Henri Bergson referred to as "duration," what Husserl called the "living present," and what I have imagined as a "fat present," a rich thick experiential present, a resounding cistern. In the terms of physics, variations in speeds and elapsed times of sound are its distinctive character—we call it resonance—and, as Nancy suggests, this sonority characterizes our very capacity to sense, the resonance between perceived and perceiver. Sound resounding—sonating and re-sonating—is a forgiving openness that allows the differences in times and characteristics to constitute the play of coherence and incoherence; the resonance is its sense and the awareness of sensing; resonance is equivalent to the "-ing," that alchemical suffix turning of nouns naming objects into a continuous tenses designating moving living actions. It occurs not in the zero time as the integral of some sensual calculus, but rather in a sonorous echoing vessel where time stretches and folds and plays and refuses linear laws as being uninteresting. It fills space in an omnidirectional way. "Sound has no hidden face, it is all in front, in back, and outside inside, inside-out in relation to the most general logic of presence as appearing ... to be listening is

to be at the same time outside and inside, to be open from without and from within, hence from one to the other and from one in the other" (13). Sound's very nature is an aesthetic of impossibles.

While the fat present is of an entirely different order of time than the scientific conception of a succession of points of no dimension, it is not that the two kinds of time do not co-exist; I've suggested the complementarity of local and global. Yet, it is rather clear I think that the concept of time as a succession of points of no dimension is itself a backfilled abstracted gridified mathematized effort to grasp the truth, the metaphysics, the essence by notions of lawful succession of dimensionless points (which obviously cannot be experienced); yet what is lost is the harmony, the experience, the thick richness of vitality. The promise of a new harmony reminds us that we are bodies experiencing ourselves and the world in duration, a fat living present, and that our song is possible only as body and body moving in the resounding cistern of the universe. Nancy stresses the differences of ear and eye.

> All sonorous presence is thus made of a complex of returns [*renvois*] whose binding is the resonance or "sonance" of sound, an expression that one should hear—hear and listen to—as much from the side of sound itself, or of *its* emission, as from the side of its reception or its listening: it is precisely from one to the other that it "sounds." Whereas visible or tactile presence occurs in a motionless "at the same time," sonorous presence is an essentially mobile "at the same time," vibrating from the come-and-go between the source and the ear, through open space, the presence of presence rather than pure presence. One might say there is a *simultaneity* of the visible and a *contemporaneity* of the audible (16, italics in original).

The terms of the new harmony are emerging. The source is the arisen human body not normalized as information but as bodied, that is, moving, living, experiencing, perceiving, improvising. The human body resounds within as inner touch, as tonus. The human body resounds in the vessel of the environment, from the near to the cosmic. The harmony is not a perfect static chord; it is a resonating and emerging composition, a

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chorale, always unfolding with the many colorations of dissonance and delightful surprises that are essential to its vitality and its characterization as interesting and moving. To the complicated question of what distinguishes dancing many fine answers might be given, yet among them is that dancing is the artful exploration of the potentiality of human movings. While we might dance for many purposes—art, entertainment, fitness, dramatic performance (storytelling), social bonding, protestation, fun—dancing does these things, or nothing external at all, by means of moving that engages the infinite variations of articulation, tone, and dynamic balance. Despite it creating the world, Nataraja's dancing was done only because dancing was his existence, his being, his life. Dancing is the whole body singing. The resounding is felt in the dancing flesh as it encounters itself and its environment. Dancing is the harmony of flesh and the world.

The Mirror World
The Poetry is in the Difference

> Shrunken Alice tells Caterpillar,
> "I'm not myself, you see ….
> being so many different sizes
> in a day is very confusing."

In the 1980s early in my academic career, the subject of my study was Native American religions. While my research focused on Navajo culture and other communities in the American Southwest, I was also interested in the study of Native American traditions throughout North America (mostly USA). With my personal experience occurred mostly in the Southwest, what seemed prominent to me as I regularly visited these cultures was how different and distinct they are one from another. Navajo folks are, as I experienced them, always on the move. They herd sheep and cattle. They ride horses. They love pickup trucks. They live in hogans spread singularly across the landscape. They tend to change home locations winter and summer. Navajo language is verb based depicting all things in terms of movings. The long history of the Navajo stems from the Athabaskan folks in northern Canada. The Pueblo folks—I was personally most familiar with the Hopi and the Zuni—are farmers with carefully tended cornfields. They live in dense complex village communities with houses more like apartment complexes. The villages are centered on dance plazas. The Hopi villages are close to one another atop mesas in the vast northern Arizona desert. Their languages are related to those in Central America as are the roots of their maze growing religious culture. While the Hopi and Zuni are both Puebloan, their languages stem from different language families. These differences that I experienced without

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any need for research are but the obvious surface level ones among what would comprise a long list. And on and on with the Yaqui and Pima and Apache folks I occasionally visited. Difference. Difference. Difference. My academic research into the ethnographies and the histories—almost all written, of course, by white visitors of one sort or another—confirmed in terms of lifeways, religion, worldview, language, and history that differences among them are prominent, deep, and uncontestable. The very idea that came to be associated with the word "culture" in the nineteenth century emphasized ways of articulating differences and distinctions among groups of people. Finding widespread sameness, I suggest, almost always involves the application of an outside perspective with cherry-picked selections and heavy-handed presentations of exempla as evidence.

When, in 1982, I was asked to write on Native American religions for a world religions textbook series, it seemed essential to me for that small book to foreground the difficult task presented by the implied assumption that all of the indigenous cultures in North America (the presumption of identity with USA than of the Western hemisphere above the equator is itself egregious) are more or less the same, that there is but one Native American religion not the hundreds that would be the obvious expectation based on my experience of difference in the American Southwest and my reading of hundreds of hefty ethnographies. I felt that the assumed commonness, singularity, universality could be nothing other than invention occurring in the context of the oppressing colonizing European-based cultures who saw all indigenous folks as a common "other," those who stood in the way of the establishment of Europeans in the Western hemisphere. This way of seeing these folks had a long and well-known history. It is the history that led to the common use of terms like "primitive," "native," "savage," and even "Indian," the last being ironic due to its origins being the confusion of early European explorers who believed they had discovered a western sea route to India. These image expectations of Native Americans tended to polarize starkly. One centered on an image of the brute, the savage, the primitive whose language was ughs and bar-bars unsuited to writing or literature. The other centered on the romanticized natural

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timeless being, at one with the land, folks unspoiled by Western literacy, technology, and even the burdens of history. To me, both were unsuited and erroneous images of the indigenous folks. The challenge I accepted when writing this textbook was to consider how to honor difference within categories of sameness—the obvious one in my task was religion, itself more a European than an indigenous designation—that were largely the typological assertions of land and idea colonizers.

Given these background concerns, in the 1980s I began to find myself confounded by the cultural/ecological use of a proper name as emblematic of a commonness, even with primordial implications, across all indigenous folks as well as late twentieth century diverse ecological communities who embraced the same name as key to communicating a persuasive positive environmental message. That name was Mother Earth. Since the popular use of the name with implications of a widely held, even universal, common referent among indigenous folks appeared to me to stand in stark contrast to the broad position of the essential identity forming differences among widely diverse folks, it presented to me an issue I needed to understand. I did not dispute the importance of this name and its various associations. This too, I could experience as obvious. But given that I felt it essential to honor the integrity of the difference and diversity among peoples and cultures, I simply had to understand the history of the use of this name.

The result of my studies was my 1987 book *Mother Earth: An American Story* published by the University of Chicago Press. My basic argument was that the name came into use as the result of three different strands of history that entwined over time. From the nineteenth century it was used by various indigenous folks as an analogy that held ancestral lands to be like the life supporting care of a mother used to argue against white European colonial efforts to take the land. Secondly, I found that from the late nineteenth well into the twentieth century general references to the land being considered as mother by "native races" were made by patternist and essentialist scholars such as E. B. Tylor, James G. Frazer, and Mircea Eliade. This proclamation was part of their effort to manage the over-whelming diversity as evident from the nineteenth century global ethnography project revealing enormous diversity among cultures. Those armchair scho-

lars, founders of much of modern social scientific and religion theory, saw their task as establishing some commonness (typologies, patterns, and archetypes) among apparent diversity to uphold their commitment to order and, more tacitly, to the oneness that in Christianity stemmed from the common ancestry of Adam and Eve. Thirdly, I found that the rise of modern ecological movements mid-twentieth century understood how essential it is to recognize the oneness of the planet and that all life is dependent on the health and well-being of a planet that serves as mother to us all.

These three strands entwined as indigenous peoples began to recognize that as they share a common plight of the threat and often loss of land to European colonial efforts, it was essential, among the vast diversity (even mutual hostility) they had long embraced, to find memes and statements expressing how essential land is to the very idea of indigeneity. The formalizing of the geographically inclusive identity as Indigenous Peoples occurred in a later phase of this movement. One's livelihood and identity are inseparable from specific lands. That is what indigenous means. Among those many and diverse cultures this common experience required a common expression that might at once have a generalized primordial quality—the land broadly conceived as the earth is essential to life, it serves as a mother—as well as possible local rendering—Spider Grandmother, Changing Woman, White Painted Lady, Pachamama. Mother Earth was widely embraced to meet this vital need. This combination of factors was presented in my book *Mother Earth.*

Despite my taking extensive care to assure that I embraced Mother Earth and the designations of her as primordial and universal—my subtitle "An American Story" was designed as indication—my study of Mother Earth, while praised by many, was also met with harsh criticism. Much of it focused on my own race. I was seen as a white man who was denying Native Americans an essential religious belief and practice. Many critics proposed something of a closed indigenous epistemology arguing that only indigenous people could comprehend Mother Earth. Almost none of the criticism sustained any connection with the argument and research information I presented. None acknowledged the importance of difference to cultural identity.

At best a few statements cherry-picked and stripped of context were used in an emotional effort to defenestrate me. The criticism was not focused on my book, it was focused on me personally, describing my identity with hackneyed attributes linking evil intentions with whiteness and maleness.

That was four decades ago. In 2021 at the annual meeting for the American Academy of Religion a special session was organized to honor me for my AAR award-winning book *The Proper Study of Religion* (2020). Among the scholars making presentations was one who studies Native American religions. I was surprised by his opening remarks which outlined in some detail his experience of me being considered by scholars who study Native American religions as a pariah and an outcast. Interestingly, this young scholar, who was not even born when *Mother Earth* was published, had done a graduate degree studying Native American religions in the department in which I was faculty and, despite my having written half a dozen books on Native American religions, he never introduced himself to me. The harsh power of this image of me persisted even as he chose to introduce his comments on my national award-winning book with these personal edgy remarks.

This perhaps overly extended descriptive personal account is I think valuable (justifiable?) to introduce the revelation that I want to center on in this essay. By chance I learned of Naomi Klein's 2023 book *Doppelganger: A Trip into the Mirror World*. It describes Klein's history of being persistently mistaken for another Naomi, her near contemporary, Naomi Wolf. I don't recall why that odd, seemingly rather personal, topic for a book appealed to me, but I acquired a copy and read it. I have been delighted and provoked by Klein's exploration of the general idea of doppelganger in its many forms with a vast array of implications. I, of course, knew the term, yet didn't realize the extent to which it has played a significant role in folklore, literature, film, and the arts and the extent of insight it offers, as Klein's book explores, to an analysis of culture with special relevance to the current plethora of crises related to media, politics, and personal understanding. She artfully interweaves her decades-long personal history of the doppelganger relationship she has experienced being identified falsely with Naomi

Wolf with a thorough and stimulating analysis of the effects of doppelganger in culture and politics.

Across the several months since I first read Klein's *Doppelganger*, I have found myself returning to it with growing realizations of its potential contribution to ideas that have engaged me for several years, even decades, under various guises. Rereading parts of her book recently, I suddenly realized the important insights the doppelganger idea offers to my experience of the response to my book *Mother Earth* beginning decades ago. As evident from my introductory description, I had been as careful as I thought possible to affirm my embrace of everything about the multiple histories of the name Mother Earth. I was attempting to show how it is possible to embrace at once remarkable and essential difference among hundreds of distinct cultures with separate languages and lifeways while also appreciating a constructed cultural common name and meme (unit of cultural identity) that has real and powerful efficacy and reality. As a scholar of the secular study of religion, I do not presume an ontological sacred or "other," defaulting to the historical use of a name leaving the cultural and ontological references to those who used the name. That was no doubt my unforgivable sin. What, thanks to Klein, I have begun, finally, to understand, to comprehend really, is that the identity constructed of me and broadly and publicly projected on me by others most who whom I didn't know and who likely had not carefully read my book if at all, has functioned as my doppelganger. I met myself in their construction as a colonizing, insensitive, near-evil, white male racist Native American-hating bad scholar. The level of personal hostility built into this doppelganger I experienced was shocking because it was so far from what I understood myself to be, from what I'd attempted to do by writing *Mother Earth*.

Klein long struggled, mostly unsuccessfully, to distinguish herself from Wolf and to disentangle herself from the positions and attributes Wolf promoted that became increasingly odious to Klein. Her motivation was beyond simply a critique of Wolf, it was because so commonly Klein was wrongly identified as Wolf. Her very writing of *Doppelganger* is evidence of her endless and ongoing struggle. She recounts how, despite her extensive efforts, disentanglement had been nearly impossible.

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Like Klein, I wanted to destroy my doppelganger, to at least show its falseness. I was sometimes offered the opportunity to respond to those who presented these harsh and negative statements about me. I realized how tricky any response would be. Almost any evidence or argument I could present would, I understood, be interpreted as furthering, and confirming their image of me—my evil doppelganger. The only strategy I thought remotely possible was to respond to these hostile diatribes by quoting my own book in the attempt to show that the claims made of me were not based on what I had written. I don't think this pathetic strategy had any impact at all. As Klein documented, "you can't shake the double because you did not create it" (Klein, 280). Indeed, a classic theme in folklore and literature is the fear that the doppelganger will replace its twin which it often does. Doppelgangers are often considered harbingers of illness, even death. A distinction of Klein's "Naomi" doppelganger, as differing from my "evil white male scholar" doppelganger, is that for Klein it seems there was no intentional malice by any one or more parties. Wolf did not intentionally present herself as Klein. The malice—the doppelganger energetic—perhaps was empowered by a society that cannot imagine that more than one woman with the same first name could be a prominent writers. On the other hand, I know and could name many of those who created my doppelganger and who did so with clear intention.

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Now to the more important insights.

Klein locates doppelgangers in a broader world of mirroring and doubling that she calls "the Mirror World." These examples include personal branding (which Klein teaches) widely practiced especially on social media, the common creation of avatars to represent some facet of ourselves to the world, our self-images that reflects how we think we are seen by others, and many other doublings. While it seems Klein is comfortable considering all these mirrorings and doublings as doppelgangers, in my experience, I find it more valuable to reserve doppelganger to designate those doubles constructed by outsiders appearing beyond the control of the one mirrored. Doppelgangers have ominous and threatening qualities. They are resistant to being controlled

or eliminated because their origins are beyond the person they mirror. To limit doppelganger to indicate but one group or type of mirroring or doubling allows the fuller and more positive consideration of other types of mirror imaging that powerfully serve distinctive human capabilities.

As I have read and reread Klein, I have been reminded that this broader Mirror World is also surprisingly familiar to me. It came about in my study of dancing based on decades of my own experience dancing and teaching dancing and my academic efforts studying dancings in cultures around the world. I sought to understand dancing largely from the perspective of the ubiquitous presence of dancing in human cultures. I came to believe that dancing reveals in its practice something remarkable about what distinguishes human beings. I sought to articulate a theory of dancing—to be a bit academically formal—based on cultural dancings, often in religious settings, of nearly all folks across the planet. This theory differs from the common academic practice of basing dance theory on the classical dancings of Western high culture, especially ballet (often referred to as "*the* dance" to emphasizing its privileged place) and more recently including "modern dance" as it has emerged from an early twentieth century critique of ballet to its place as art and high culture. I found philosophical support for my efforts in the works of the mid-twentieth century phenomenologist Maurice Merleau-Ponty, although he did not write about dancing (See Gill 2012).

My efforts at articulating my understanding of dancing included seeking what means and products distinguish dancing among the arts. I asked what in dancing is equivalent to paint and brush and canvas, to chisel and stone, to pencil and paper, even to instrument and song. Further, as I considered various art forms, I recognized that most rely on and privilege specific senses. Painting and photography and sculpture, the eyes (vision) and perhaps also touch. Music, the ear (hearing). Dancing requires nothing more than the moving body. Further, dancing makes no product or object other than the moving body. The product, should we insist on one, is ephemeral. None of the quotidian five senses seems particularly distinctive or dominant in dancing, yet as the whole body is involved all the senses seem likely engaged. Of course, a dance audience relies

on vision and most likely (not always) hearing. As I struggled with these issues in my 2012 book *Dancing Culture Religion*, I began with *moving* as at least the broad milieu of action engaged in dancing. Dancing seems commonly to have patterns of movings. Dance forms and styles are comprised of distinctive patternings of movings, step sequences, body postures, repeatable moves, distinctive stylings, often highly articulatable technique. I thus considered dancing in terms of *gesturing*. But then as I began to consider dancing as it is experienced and witnessed from this perspective I found help in the "flesh ontology" of Merleau-Ponty (1968). I articulated dancing in the terms I call "self-othering."

This understanding of dancing has its core in what I think is the distinctively human ability to objectify parts or even our entire physical bodies. Such a capacity is quite remarkable to me. We can consider our fist a hammer, our shoulder a battering ram, and so on. Dancers sometimes refer to their bodies, perhaps inspired by musicians, as their instruments. I argue that when we consider a part of our body as an object it does not cease to be experienced subjectively as self, as my body, as felt, as me. When we consider part or all our body as other, as object, doing so does not create a crisis of reason or identity, a crisis of experiencing something as both object and subject, a rational incongruity forcing us to halt until a resolution to the conflict is achieved. Rather this seemingly impossible copresence is, upon analysis (if we must), appreciated as the source of exploration, agency, perception, learning, and power. I invoke Maurice Merleau-Ponty's "flesh ontology" to articulate this remarkable and distinctive human capability. To exemplify this copresence he focused on one hand touching the other with the accompanying experience of the one doing the touching, the other being touched, a subject acting on an object. Yet both, at once, are experienced without doubt as being parts of one whole human body; both being *my* hands. He described the "reversibility" that occurs when with intention we shift the roles of the touching and the touched hands. He includes in this experience of touching both the external exteroceptor sense of feelings and the internal proprioceptive/kinesthetic (terms Merleau-Ponty did not use) sense of touching, what Heller-Roazen (2009) called "the inner touch."

Dancing commonly engages the objectification of the moving body as the *dance* that is being effected (made, if ephemerally) by the subjective usually intentional actions (self-moving) of the *dancer*. The dancing body is at once subject and object. The dance is the *art* made by the dancer who is *artist* while the art and the artist are physically identical. I have argued that dancing is surely one of the most quintessential of human actions because nothing is involved (at least as essential) beyond the moving body. Dancing, in one sense, is the mechanism of engaging the whole feeling body in the experience of the impossible copresence of subject and object, self and other; the two that is also the one.

While not essential to dancing, it may involve the identity (often culturally or religiously specified) of the "other" being danced, perhaps a figure in mythology or story or even an abstract idea. Akin to masking, dancing then may involve the dancer's bodied experience of a figure or idea that is not the dancer. In this common aspect of dancing, one experiences transcendence itself, the bodied subjective experience of what is beyond oneself, even beyond one's quotidian world. A *transcendent immanence*.

With the distinctively human doubling considered more broadly, we may include as mirroring the classic stage in human development when a 6- to 18-month-old child becomes able to identify herself in a mirror. Subject becomes object, while also being subject. The "I" I experience as bodied (subject), as me, becomes also the "I" I perceive out there (object) in the mirror. Psychologically throughout life we of course discover or create many images of ourselves that we use to evaluate and adjust who we are in the process of being who we wish to be or who we wish others might consider us to be. Our past, our memories, our future, our plans all rely on the subject that is object while also remaining subject. Mirrorings and doublings are not all doppelgangers as Klein seems to hold. Let's save that term for a powerful subset of mirrorings. Even such constructs as soul, persona, being, spirit, ego, alter-ego, and so on are possible only because of this mirroring proclivity distinctive to humans.

The principal distinction of doppelganger among the many doublings essential to being human is the uncanny likeness that appears out there that is not of our making and that presents an

emotional and rational crisis or threat when encountered. The word "uncanny" is appropriate since, in its meaning dating from 1773, it has referred to persons who are not quite safe to trust or deal with because of their association with the supernatural. By 1843 in English uncanny indicated having a supernatural character or being weird, mysterious, strange. Many common doublings and mirrorings are self-generated as powerful mechanisms essential to our extending and evaluating and changing ourselves. The impossible copresence of subject and object of these mirrorings do not present a rational crisis or threat even as they are rational impossibles. Doppelgangers on the other hand are unwelcome intrusions of likenesses that we cannot reconcile—weird, mysterious—yet we feel we must destroy because they are threatening to our identity, to our health and sanity and life. Doppelganger presents an image that uncannily appears as me but is experienced as alien, as different. "There I am, but that sure as hell isn't me." Klein as a self-aware author writing her story, her book, to represent an aspect of her life is presenting a mirrored fragment of the totality that is Klein. Surely as a writer this written image is a doubling that she has carefully constructed and serves as her "publishable Naomi." This mirroring is constructive and positive. Yet, her story of herself has as a protagonist a "doppelganger Naomi" (Wolf or is it Klein?), that is an evil and unwelcomed twin that she did not make or chose to be identified with.

The specific type of impact and experience of difference is what I suggest distinguishes doppelganger among mirrorings. Yet, beyond doppelgangers, there are many doublings creating images intended to forge differences within biological unity to evaluate and change and extend. These differences create a welcomed and necessary objectivity within a subjectivity without the copresence being threatening. Doppelganger, among mirrorings, threatens unity and identity by collapsing difference (or threatening to) between doppelganger and its twin insisting they are the same, identical, when the one experiencing this mirrored image wants only the greatest difference and distance. Yet, I argue, there are many other mirrorings that are experienced as "There I am, that's me or how I want me to be." Doppelganger mirrorings are experienced as "Wait, that looks like me, others think that is me, but that isn't me. I don't want

anything to do with that me. Why do others think that is me? How do I get away from it or destroy it? Is it going to replace me?" The difference is all about the difference.

What has surprised me in my recent reflections (ahem!) on doppelgangers and all mirrorings—including my realization that my academic life and reputation have been influenced for decades by an imposed doppelganger—is that I have long been interested in the distinctively human capabilities that are necessary to mirrorings. Dancing as self-othering is a major example. However, perhaps even more surprising to me is how this doubling/mirroring is akin to a distinctive human capability that has been central to my work over the last few years. I have constantly examined and developed what I refer to as *aesthetic of impossibles* (especially Gill 2023 and almost every publication since 2019). What I have explored under this rubric is the way in which humans commonly consider two or more things as the being same, even identical, when we know full well they are not the same at all. The humble metaphor is my go-to example. With metaphor we equate two things that we know are not the same at all. Relationship is a journey. Argument is war. We do so to comprehend abstract ideas (relationship, argument), but also in service to the acquisition of all knowledge. Metaphor is something of a bootstrap that allows us to begin with what we know—usually what we experience as banal—and extend it to something new and unknown. All language is shot through with metaphor. Metaphor is not simply some poetic decoration; it is, as Lakoff and Johnson (1980) and others have shown, the workhorse of communication and the discovery and extension of knowledge. This human capacity I call aesthetic of impossibles constructs a copresence by saying one thing is another thing that it clearly is not (impossible). Yet, this seeming rational impossible does not create a crisis of reason or sanity. Humans not only tolerate these impossible copresents (so common as to rarely even be noted); our very humanness (I argue) is in our capacity to use these impossible copresents creatively and productively. Language is comprised of words—spoken or written—that are identical with objects and actions beyond the words (spoken or written), yet clearly the word and the object or action are not the same. "Cat" is a word and an animal, yet I can only pet the animal. The two are one, the same, but at once

also not the same even ontologically. Art and photography are artifice—that is clever, made up, crafty—yet they are often representational and expressive of something which they are not. Play—from kids' play to theater—engages an aesthetic of impossible. So too memory, imagination, future, thought itself.

I have explored comparison as a common and essential method of advancing knowledge as necessarily requiring the aesthetic of impossibles. When we compare, we place two things together by the artful practice of doing so in such a way that there is an essential sameness (usually articulated by the comparer) while also an uncontested difference. If there is no difference then there is nothing to be gained, nothing of interest, no potential benefit to the act of comparing. Comparison does not resolve the difference or explain it away. Rather it is the persistence of difference that empowers the ongoing action of comparing. The results are expression, clarification, or the expansion of knowledge, even grander, the exertion of agentive force on the world.

The aesthetic of impossibles is to conjoin as identical or as like, things we know are not the same at all. On the other hand, mirrorings and doublings, including doppelgangers, shatter the obvious unity and integrity of something—the physical singularity of body is inarguable—by presenting multiple copies or images that appear in some respect the same, even uncannily identical, yet are clearly different, often in a dramatic respect. The aesthetic of impossibles and mirrorings/doublings are thus complementary. What seems to me remarkable and, after a lifetime of studying human distinctiveness, remarkably surprising— uncannily so—is that these complementary human strategies are based on how humans rely, for their very distinctiveness, on abiding difference. What is outstanding in both is not that difference is embraced to engage the process of reconciliation, resolution, or explanation. Rather these relationalities are built on *abiding* difference, on difference that, despite its rational impossibility, is embraced as essential. In both aesthetic of impossibles and mirrorings/doublings, I argue that humans thrive on and realize their most distinctive humanness in their exercise of the ability to hold together two or more things that are not the same at all, while at once considering them identical or the same. This human faculty is not just tolerance of impos-

sible copresents, it is the active engagement of impossible copresents essential to strategies of managing difference to power (make possible) perception, action, learning, communication, creativity … all things distinctively human.

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What is distinctive and important about doppelgangers, as I propose we understand them, is that they serve as a warning regarding the consequences of losing difference. Doppelganger presents an outside uncanny likeness, in some respect, to their real human twin with usually ominous differences that threatens to replace or destroy their double. In other words, in the wide human harnessing of the seeming impossible copresence of the two that are also one, doppelganger threatens the collapse of the essential difference. Early twentieth century, German philosopher Walter Benjamin was concerned with the mechanical reproduction of art (1936) which he recognized eliminates the difference between *original* and *copy*. Without this difference, the presence or "aura" (Benjamin's term indicating a certain presence) of the original is lost. Provenance, forgery, fake, authentic all become nearly meaningless when there is no difference between original and copy. The present trends of Artificial Intelligence to create art and poetry and prose that are evaluated on a Turing-type Test of "passing" for human makings, is the current iteration of seeking the loss of difference. Today we are constantly presented with the challenge of distinguishing between human made and AI made. We fear these AI-made doppelgangers. This example might be presented as a mechanization (or digitization) of the doppelganger threat to difference by indistinguishable replacements; synths of all sorts walking unknown among us. The seeming constant fear and wonder evoked by AI advancements attests to its doppelganger energetics. Even to its designers and originators, AI seems to evoke something of the mysterious, the ineffable.

The disappearance of difference was also the concern of Jean Baudrillard in his classic *Simulation and Simulacra* (1981). He saw this doppelganger effect (not his term) as expanding in the modern era through the advancements of communication technology. When the simulation is inseparable from the simulated or, as he suggested might come to even precede it, Baudrillard

posits the rise of a hyperreality, a reality in which, as Orpheus suggested in the movie "The Matrix," "all things are possible." Yet endless possibility also means there is no discerning of real from unreal, map from territory. Baudrillard's words—which poetically express the sentiment of much of my recent work—are remarkably provocative, "difference … constitutes the poetry of the map and the charm of the territory, the magic of the concept and the charm of the real." The power terms in this brief word-jewel—poetry, charm, magic—all rely on an essential and abiding difference. In such a hyperreality, everything becomes banal and base. Without difference, poetry, charm, and magic cannot exist. His invocation of the essential relationship of map and territory—that must be at once identical and different—reminds of Lewis Carroll's charming rift in *Sylvie and Bruno Concluded* (1893) on the consequences of the scale of one-to-one for map to territory. Such a map would be useless because should it be unfolded "it would block out the sun."

In my field of religion studies among my mentor Jonathan Z. Smith's most important contributions was his exploration of the consequences that would accompany the indistinguish-ablility of map and territory in religions and in the academic study of religion. Religions may be characterized by how they create, articulate, and negotiate fundamental differences through mythology, ritual, features of doctrine (sin, forgiveness, rules, belief, free will and so on). All these, he argued, rely on the persistence of incongruity and gaps. He also saw that the maintenance and engagement of difference is at the core of most academic methods and operations. He persistently focused on comparison. the quotidian workhorse of academia, indeed of the acquisition of all knowledge. He distinguished himself from his senior colleague, Mircea Eliade, who had articulated the widely embraced understanding of religion mid twentieth century, in terms of their distinct attitudes toward difference. Whereas Eliade sought sameness, even identity, among the vast universe of religions, Smith preferred to focus on difference, incongruity, chaos, play, gaps, and incredulity which he believed to be more interesting and revealing. In my own work, for decades I have been fascinated with such notions as masking—that requires the copresence of mask and masker, the same yet distinct—and play—in all forms positing an impossible copresence—and

dancing—that I've understood as a process of what I term "self-othering" as a way of bodily experiencing as one's own body something or someone other than oneself. More recently I have attempted to locate this human capacity that so fascinates me in the distinctiveness in the evolution of human biology especially as it can be articulated in the analysis of the biology of human self-moving. For all these, the poetry is in the difference.

Despite my paean to the human delight in difference in all its creative glory, I find that many areas of society seem devoted to the elimination of difference, the closing of gaps, the resolution of impossible copresents, to what Henri Bergson called the "retrograde movement to the truth." One would surely think such a drive would be laudable. To me it suggests the doppel-ganger effect as laying siege to reality.

Academia—indeed much of Western pedagogy and practical epistemology—seems founded on the proposition that all things must be described and explained (away?). Academia insists on being definitive and conclusive. Schools at all levels measure learning by right or wrong, true or false, acquiring and repeating information. The model seems more like adding beans to a jar rather than the nurturing of organic growth. The inherent distance/difference between learning and the world is literally built into educational architecture and furniture, yet education tends to ignore the power of abiding difference in the impossible copresence of sameness.

Politics has become entirely untethered from any grounding that would reveal the difference required of false claims and lies. Fact checking has become a curiosity from a former era, a source of amusement as much as anything of consequence to legisla-tion. The political world has become hyperreal, where messaging and poll numbers precede and often totally replace anything to do with bodied reality (which is given occasional lip service by referring to it as matters for "kitchen tables"). Policy, legislation, any concern with people and planet are being rapidly replaced by hyperreal vacuous misinformation with little or no referent, recited only for purposes of the retention of power that, because of the absence of the real, is itself increasingly vacuous. Anything real is under siege. The very idea of real is under siege.

The virtuality of media, the artificiality of intelligence, the faux world of scripted "reality" television, and so much more

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have all threatened the experienced differences that make a difference. The ubiquitous test of the products of AI is their indistinguishability from the products of human intelligence and creativity. Success (and a plethora of unfounded claims) has become where the difference has been overcome.

The replacement fears that underlie racism, sexism, xenophobia, ageism, sexual identity, and on and on seem also to rely on the invocation of the doppelganger energetic, the alternative constructed evil twin that threatens to overcome difference. In so many arenas in contemporary life, to many folks difference feels intolerable, threatening, the enemy. Bullying, trolling, racial and many other types of profiling, ageism, and so much more are driven by the doppelganger energetic that poses a negative image of the fleshy other intended to invoke fear and to devalue difference. Yet, the core of the ideas I am arguing is that the poetry is in the difference. Seeing difference as the enemy is to lay siege to reality itself.

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In 2018 I was invited to Umeå University in Sweden to lecture on my Mother Earth studies. I hadn't thought much about my earlier work, yet oddly still smarting from occasional encounter with my doppelganger evil twin. As my career seemed to be winding down (I'm still at it!) I had, in an occasional odd minute, contemplated returning one day to this troubling era to attempt (as I see it now) to slay my doppelganger once and for all. Fool that I persist in being. My lecture in Sweden was embraced yet in the discussion following it one person insisted that Mother Earth is clearly an ancient universal figure as evident in the Asian cultures of her research. It seemed to me her comments reflected her perception of me being somehow the enemy of Mother Earth. A hint of the persistence of my evil twin.

A couple years later I revised the Umeå Mother Earth lecture thinking publication might be of interest for a variety of reasons. Of course, I wanted to finally bring personal conclusion to this forty-year saga by one final effort to restate in new and hopefully creative and insightful terms what I had long ago wanted to achieve, sans evil twin. Still, feeling the value of provocation I chose the terms *name*, *meme*, and *conspiracy* as the core ideas of my argument. Evidence perhaps of becoming my evil twin. The

editor of the *Journal for the Study of Nature, Religion, and Culture* saw promise in the new work and proposed its publication accompanied by the invited comments of several scholars with relevant backgrounds along with my responses to their comments.

The responses of the several scholars who so graciously and thoughtfully offered their constructive rejoinders is interesting to my present analysis, to my concern for the importance of difference. The scholars who responded to my Mother Earth paper were concerned with the implications of the gaps I was creating by articulating multiple strands of history and by my seeing the various uses of this name as human constructs. Several offered alternatives that would, in my present terms, close the gaps and be less controversial. One response simply ignored my paper almost entirely to offer speculative evidence for the widespread existence of Mother Earth in several ancient cultures. The presumption it seemed to me was to demonstrate the universality and unity and primordiality of whatever is referenced by the name. I suspect that there are echoes of the doppelganger energetics in some of these responses in the seeming necessity to present alternatives free of multiplicity, difference, gaps, (history?) the copresence of one and many. There is, I sense, even an uneasiness about my exclusive focus on human initiative and my avoidance of the embrace of some ontological Sacred Other. There is, as I read them, an urge for commonness, unity, and acceptance behind some of the polite and gracious remarks. As I look back to the 1980s response to *Mother Earth*, I think I understand that those who reacted with such hostility were threatened by the presence of difference. To close the gap, they felt it necessary to construct a doppelganger of me and my book. The doppelganger they constructed of me was perhaps motivated by my presenting the gaps, the differences, among various Mother Earths and the difference between a secular consideration of history and the religious beliefs of those whose histories I was charting. Sadly, as I gain a measure of clarity these now many decades later, I realize that my life and work have been persistently and negatively impacted by the uncanny looming threat of this old doppelganger.

Lest there be any residual confusion, I want to conclude with as much clarity as I can. First, I want to strongly argue that human distinctiveness is inseparable from the often-tacit embrace of rationally impossibles. It is this distinctive, if overlooked, capacity that has enabled the amazing accomplishments, especially the expansion of knowledge, the exercise of creativity, the articulation of the profound and complex, and the skilled achievements of art and beauty. We humans conjoin as the same, even identical, two or more things that we know are not the same at all. We either conjoin as the same what we know to be different (aesthetic of impossibles) or, in a complementary strategy, we shatter the unity of body and organism by constructing images, doubles, mirrored reflections multiplying ourselves, others, or the world. The many facets constructed are held as copresent with the obvious unity. We engage both capacities without experiencing threats to sanity or reason or the need to reconcile. These seeming rational impossibles are embraced as essential to valuation, reflection, growth, creativity. Both complementary capacities are, while to me utterly amazing, remarkably banal, of the fabric of being human. Both distinctive capacities and capabilities rely on abiding difference. Without difference, without the continuing distinction and difference, the human capacity to value, communicate, compare, create, learn, exercise distinctly human identity would collapse. In such an existence there can be no discernment, no valuation, no reflection. The very notion of reality becomes less than senseless.

Notes on the Cover Images

I asked Microsoft Copilot AI image generator to "create an AI photo quality image of a natural arch in a desert landscape with a snow-covered mountain background." Four images were quickly produced. All had a fantasy art painting style rather than photo realism. Two had high thin arches, each with a bulge at the apex framing spiky snow-covered mountains in the distance. A third had a massive rock formation with a huge arch taking up much of the image. The foreground was desert with, oddly, a stream running through it. Faint snow-covered spiky mountains occupied the background. The fourth, the image that appears on the cover of Volume Two, has a natural arch clearly modeled on Delicate Arch in Arches National Park in Utah. I had visited and photographed this arch, along with many others, in the spring of 2023. Having many of my own photos of various arches was my motivation for the specific prompt in my AI experiment. I chose one of my photographs—the one that most closely matched the AI image—for the cover of Volume One.

I submitted the same prompt to several other AI image creating applications to see what they would produce. I was surprised that one app produced several images with the obvious pattern of the Delicate Arch. Curious, I Googled images of "natural arches" and a large percentage of results were photos of Delicate Arch. Perhaps this arch has become iconic because it appears on the Utah State license plate. The results from several apps were varied, some Lego block style, many fantasy scapes, yet none that anyone would confuse with a photograph despite my specifying "photo realism."

For a second "reality" test I focused on flowers, a prominent photography interest of mine. At the Denver Botanic Gardens, I make hundreds of photographs of flowers throughout the year.

Among the most pleasing to me are photos of water lilies with the blooms reflected in the water. I had one printed on metal in a ten-inch by thirty-inch size. Thinking that the distinctiveness of flowers would surely provide AI image generators with a more concrete base for constructing images, I prompted various AI apps to create an image of "several lily pads and one purple lily flower with reflection in water." All the results were cartoonish with oversaturated colors. None gave me one lily flower among several lily pads. They filled the image with many flowers often in a rainbow of colors, despite my specifying purple. All had reflections in the water that were too-perfect mirror images of the flowers. The compositions were consistently chaotic.

In my routine photography editing work I occasionally engage AI to do an autofill of areas where my image doesn't fill the frame. Many photo editing apps have this AI capability. I am usually stunned by the seamlessness and quality of the results. I am also surprised at the extent to which these AI tools can construct large areas including unexpected features that appear natural to the whole resulting image. And, of course, AI tools can endlessly and seamlessly remove objects, add objects, adjust objects in existing photographs. These are operations most photo editing apps regularly include. It seems that at this point AI capabilities to modify an existing image are superior to its ability to create an entire image based on a prompt.

The motivation for my AI image experiment was to align the cover art with the theme "reality under siege." The current vogue in AI image making is a Turing-style test to evaluate the computer (AI, VR, AR, etc.) output on the degree to which it is indistinguishable from, even superior to, human creations. We humans love to engage funhouse mirror worlds. It is an exercise of capacities that distinctive us as *Homo sapiens* with the capability for self-reflection. The rise of photography technology and more recently AI technology, enhances our ability. While, in terms of technological advancements alone, even the first fuzzy photograph was an amazing accomplishment. I consider the AI construction of the image on the cover of Volume Two, to be on the order of a technological miracle. I'm not totally ignorant of how AI works, yet I feel astounded to be able to type in a brief description (I could have just spoken it) and get four

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different results almost immediately. I consider all of them interesting if not quite fulfilling some criteria of my request. And, in a reverse test, I could not produce anything remotely on the order of any of them, ever! The point is that mirroring and doubling is nothing new, while the tools available to us to accomplish these doublings are constantly advancing with no end in sight. Likely before long three-dimensional doublings will be common, if perhaps a bit spectral.

The subtitle of these volumes identifies the persistent leitmotif through the essays. It is fittingly articulated by Baudrillard's phrase "the poetry is in the difference." In planning cover images that would offer something of this poetry, I was not hoping for an AI created image that would pass a Turing-style test. With two "like" cover images, it was the difference that interested me. If the AI apps produced photo-realistic images of that would pass as a natural arch in a real landscape, the difference would still be the most interesting. Should I place my photograph and an AI produced photo-realistic image of an invented arch side by side there would remain a world of difference, at least for me. What is revealed in the exercise is that the value of images is not wholly in the image itself. It is in the relationship of the objects/images to the makers, users, and beholders. It is human experience in encounter that is fundamental. Poetry, charm, magic are not objectively available to simply be placed in an image. They exist only as aspects of human experience. The failure to recognize the presence of human experience is I think at the core of the broad siege on reality.

I cannot help but constantly reflect on the *experience* that is associated with artifacts. I never understand why one would want to have a photograph that would pass for real that would replace or obfuscate the complex and long process of the human experience of gaining the skill to make such an image. I faced this issue when I want to Arches National Park to photograph the landscape. I knew that for far less money I could simply pur-chase images made by renowned artists and photographers that were far superior to any I might make. Why not save the time and money? Simply stay home and order up one of these images. But I did not choose that option because any image I might make (even a quick phone snap) would be more than the

physical image. It would mirror the *experience* I had in making the image and my long experience in gaining photographic skill. Here is a mirroring in words of my experience with the image on Volume One.

> *At age 80 I went on a solo road trip through the American Southwest, a region of personal significance to me. I studied Native American cultures in this area decades ago. I held a university position in Arizona. I had lived for a time in a hogan with Navajos. At Arches I arose super early one day and drove into the park a dozen or so miles to the parking lot at the base of the one-to-two-mile trail to Delicate Arch. I have had two heart attacks and have a condition called "chronotropic incompetence," which means my heart rate doesn't adequately increase in response to physical exertion. With camera and water in hand I headed up the trail. It seemed steep to me although a few years ago I could have run it. I tried to be patient with my needing to stop frequently. Taking longer than I'd have liked I finally made it to the arch. The light wasn't optimal, yet the massive arch and the scenery were spectacular. Looking down far in the distance and hundreds of feet lower I could make out the parking lot where I had started. I'd made it. I felt a tiny bit of pride. For several hours I enjoyed the scenery and took photographs of the arch from the areas around the arch I thought were relatively safe. Eventually I hiked down the trail, much easier, and drove twenty miles to another area where I took another hike of a couple miles to photograph other arches. It was an exhausting yet exhilarating day. Later, I spent hours editing the images I'd captured trying to make them appear like what I recalled from my experience; to mirror my memory of my physical experience. Of course, the results disappointed when I compared them with the many photos of the same arch made by professional photographers. Yet the resulting images were doublings of the token variety of my singular experience. The photo of Delicate Arch on the cover of Volume One mirrors an experience that is rich in countless dimensions, yet to me perhaps more so than to others. It is at once a badge of life achievement and* memento mori.

In contrast, the similar image of a arch on the cover of Volume Two reflects my few minutes experimenting with an AI image-making tool. The story it tells is interesting to me yet, in comparison, almost insignificant. The image does not reflect the years of building photography skills or the pleasure of exercising

it. It does not include memories of travel or the real presence of the landscape. It does not evoke the sense of time inevitable in experiencing such natural features or the relative place of one person (of humankind in total) in such a vast timescape. It does not reflect my successfully meeting the physical challenge as an 80-year-old with heart disease. It does not capture the poignancy of my feeling that I'll not be back to that place ever again. It does not inspire stories—written or told.

The siege I see threatening reality might be summed as my sense that we seem increasingly satisfied with simulacra, the doubles, the maps, the AI-generated images, the data, the information, the ads, the purchased photographs made by others, and so on as being adequate and complete without any original, aura, territory, human experience, human skill, reflection, difference, comparison, story. We seem increasingly satisfied to purchase a simulacrum of reality, often virtual, engaging no other experience than a transaction. When cold impersonal doubles are embraced as singularly satisfying, then the very possibility of reality—which I believe is inseparable from the distinctive capabilities of being biologically human, of feeling and experiencing—is seriously threatened.

For me, ultimately, we must focus on why we want all these outputs (replicas) from technology. Give me a couple hours and I, as anyone, could prompt freely available AI to make dozens of poems, to write as many songs, to write college essays undetectable by teachers, to produce many images of anything I can imagine. Give me a week and I could accumulate terabytes of this stuff. But for what? For whom? Why poetry? Why songs? Why college essays? Why images? Who is benefitting from these? Who is looking at them? Who enjoys and treasures them? Who is learning from making them? None are accompanied by the stories of creators or the experiences of the readers, listeners, viewers. None attest to having come to exist as the result of a years of honing skills through endless practice. None of them bears the wisdom gradually built on failure, fear, heartbreak, worry, death, loss. None of them reflect the joy and satisfaction of making things simply for the love of doing so. All these products are just stuff produced by high-speed probability calculators. Technological processes are not (or very little) accompanied by experience or inspiration or imagination or joy

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or failure. Without the implicit doubling with abiding difference, without the experience of human creative encounter, without the long process of human skilled intentional making, without the potential to inspire story and beauty and wonder … these things are just clutter.

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