

editor's note



The papers published in *Glimpse: Proceedings, 2004* are collected from the 6th Annual International Conference of the Society for Phenomenology and Media, held in Provo, Utah, and co-sponsored by Brigham Young University and National University. The theme of the conference, media and religion, brought aspects of religion, the religious experience, spirituality and belief into consideration from a wide range of phenomenological and hermeneutic perspectives, including those inspired by Husserl, Ingarden, Ricoeur, Merleau-Ponty, and Heidegger, as well as approaches brought into play from outside of the phenomenological tradition. Broadly speaking, papers dealt with either organized religion or the religious experience. In this volume, a wide spectrum of views are represented.

Dennis Skocz analyzes contemporary media as the perfect match for Christian missionary zeal. Skocz avoids treating the reactionary political ideology that infuses contemporary *propaganda fide* and, also setting aside historical considerations, focuses on revealing parallels in media and missionary work. Working in another direction, Kathryn Egan, using notions derived from Paul Ricoeur, successfully attempts to read the sacred text of the Church of Latter-Day Saints of Jesus Christ, *The Book of Mormon*, as providing an essential religious experience, providing religious authenticity for those who would apply the same approach to *The Lord of the Rings*, *Star Wars*, and *The Matrix*. In yet another direction, Owen Kelly describes the creation of a Gnostic religion in the cyberspace virtual world being created by his students at Arcata Polytechnic in Helsinki, leaving open the fascinating possibility of virtual religious wars and the virtual suppression of virtual heresies to the virtual future.

Charles Harvey and Matti Itkonen write on film. Harvey's essay draws on conclusions concerning Husserlian phenomenology that have been published elsewhere, bringing his careful understanding of *epoché*, phenomenological reduction, and constitution to bear on the religious aspects of Gabriel Axel's *Babette's Feast*. Harvey's broader work deserves close attention for those interested in underlying contradictions in Husserl's work. Itkonen, applying a highly subjectivist phenomenology, gives an exhaustive treatment of Finnish critical reactions to Julie Taymor's *Frida*, ending in a poetic discourse that has become the hallmark of his writing.

The opening essay by the John Durham Peters, powered by the enthusiasm of classroom lecture and discourse, was given as the keynote of the conference. Peters broadens the role of voice in communication theory to include religion and religious communication, sacred and mundane, making interesting reference to traditional phenomenological theory.

Randall Dana Ulveland, much in the manner of Itkonen, finds genuine phenomenological descriptiveness in poetic discourse, having the reader dwell on the inner-spiritual side of religious experience and removing attention from consideration of corporate religion, specifically avoiding notions of a the church as *the body of Christ*.

Finding analyses of propaganda by Chomsky and Althusser incomplete because of their attention to narrative content, Chris Nagel suggests that another aspect of media propaganda needs attention: the prepredicative, perceptual media experience. Paul Majkut suggests that application of eidetic and hermeneutic methodologies to religion, religious texts, and the religious experience allows, in practice, a variety of strange creatures in the backdoor of rational discourse.

The uses and abuses of media by organized religions are at a fever-pitch today, not only in the United States, but throughout the world; not only among monotheist Jews, Christians, and Moslems, but also among Hindus, Buddhists, and others. Undeniably, such propaganda is part-and-parcel of a larger ideological movement that includes at its base political-economic determinants, whether conscious or not, and this movement may be characterized as extremely reactionary. In the US, such propaganda is associated with the “religious right” and, while this description may be accurate for the contemporary situation, it is often erroneously taken as a recent social phenomenon. But use of media for rightwing religious-political ends is nothing new in the United States—or elsewhere.

The printing press itself was first used to spread Christian ideology and the successful use of the baroque emblem book by the Jesuits in the counter-reformation (the antecedent of today’s “comic book” and the only place in the contemporary art scene where Renaissance humanist perspective is alive and well) reminds us that media form and content are inseparable. The groundbreaking work of Siegfried Kracauer in *From Hitler to Caligari* gave us an exceptional model for analyzing the content and style of a

film as inevitable expressions of ideological positions, a model that may beneficially be applied to religious texts and other media well.

In the recent historical past, religious abuse of media includes a long line of extremist radio demagogues, most famously the “radio priest,” Father Charles E. Coughlin. This anti-Semitic, racist, and pro-fascist demagogue’s pronouncements, broadcast from the Shrine of the Little Flower on Woodward in Royal Oak, outside of Detroit, enflamed a generation during the Great Depression. Others, such as the Rev. Gerald L. K. Smith, the Rush Limbaugh of his day, spewed white Christian supremacist ideology, providing the ideological ground for that movement today. The list of such fanatics is too long to include here, but stretches back into an obscure historical past.

As solid and significant as papers collected here are in terms of phenomenological description, it is unfortunate that this volume does not include more on organized religion’s media justifications of the glaring crimes of contemporary religion—widespread terror, war, pedophilia, financial corruption, political manipulation, racism, and extreme, repressive rightwing causes. Why this is the case is itself a question for consideration.

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