

Eternal Sunshine of the Academic Mind

Essays on Religion and Film

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Preface

For decades now the Society for the Study of Religion, Literature and the Arts has been encouraging scholars through conferences, publications and general collegial support to investigate the relationship between the arts, literature and the religious systems of the world. To this substantial project, this small collection is offered in thanks. In these collected papers we not only celebrate the Society's good work but attempt to increase scholarly understandings of how the moving picture is able to inform on our approach to the religious field and look again at how knowledge on religions is generated – in this case from a mainly popular-culture focused perspective.

I would like to thank all those who helped me organise the 2007 one-day symposium from which these papers were gathered. Special thanks go to executive directors of the Society for their ongoing help, in particular Associate Professor Carole Cusack. Deep appreciation and thanks must also be extended to my doctoral student Alex Norman for his help in editing the following pages, his work in liaising with the various on-line publication units at the University of Sydney (Fisher Library in particular), for setting out the following text in an on-line compatible manner, and for all the small administrative tasks that threaten to swamp any editor.

Finally thanks to all whose academic contributions made the symposium such a joy to attend and who will make this collection a worthy read.

Christopher Hartney
Sydney
May 2009

List of Contributors

Zoe Alderton is a doctoral candidate in the department of Studies in Religion in the University of Sydney, researching the development of Christian symbols in modern painting and outsider art. She completed her bachelor of arts (Honours Class I) in 2008 with a thesis exploring another of her great loves, the religious significance of the music of Nick Cave. She is currently preparing a section of this for publication in Christopher Hartney (ed.), *Creative Fantasy and the Religious Imagination* (Sydney SSLA 2009, in press).

David Michael Brown is a freelance writer contributing to such publications as *Film Review*, *Filmink*, *Shivers*, *Smoke and Mirrors*, *Drum Media*, *Cinema Retro* and *Starburst*. He is presently researching a book on director and Warhol associate Paul Morrissey and reviews films on Sydney radio station Eastside FM's Cinemascope show. A huge fan of the trashier side of cult films, his love of the movies of Russ Meyer, John Waters and Mario Bava shows no bounds: he proudly declares that *Faster Pussycat Kill! Kill!* and *Danger: Diabolik* are his all time favourite films, and meeting *A Clockwork Orange* star Malcolm McDowell was the biggest thrill of his professional career thus far.

Arash Chehelnabi is a postgraduate student at the University of Sydney examining the cinematic dimensions of history.

Timothy Goldsmith recently completed a PhD in History at University of Melbourne on The Theology of David Koresh. A early version of his paper published herein was delivered at the AASR 2006 conference in Adelaide.

Christopher Hartney is a lecturer in the department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. He is an executive member of the Society for Religion, Literature and the Arts and specialises in the interface between literature and the religious. He is also co-editor of the *Journal of Religious History* (Blackwell) and the author of *Cambridge Studies in Religion* (Cambridge University Press, 2008).

Suzanne Langford is an undergraduate student in the Bachelor of Arts programme at the University of Sydney. Her major is Studies in Religion, essays for which have won her the John Cooper Memorial Prize.

Elisha McIntyre is a doctoral student in the Department of Studies in Religion at the University of Sydney. Her research interests come under the broad umbrella of religion and popular culture with a particular emphasis on religion in the contemporary Western world. Her current research focuses on religion and humour as expressed in popular religious entertainment and material culture. She has thus far managed to incite interest in Mormon comedy film, and hopes this trend will continue to earn a place for religious humour as a serious field of study in the discipline.

Trevor Melksham graduated from the University of Sydney in 2007 with a major in Studies in Religion and Australian Studies. He believes the combination of the two disciplines enabled him to explore his growing interest in Australian Civil Religion, which to him, seems a strangely under-developed field of study. Now aged 52, Trevor spent 21 years as a senior trade union official, before leaving to complete his university studies and work as a consultant in the private sector. He is currently Manager – Employment Conditions and Policy with the federal Attorney General's Department, Canberra.

Johanna Petsche is a postgraduate student in the Studies in Religion department. She completed her Music/Arts double degree in 2007, majoring in Performance in clarinet, Philosophy and Studies in Religion. In 2008 she achieved first class honours in Studies in Religion, focusing on pianist Keith Jarrett's spiritual beliefs and his claims of channelling inspiration from a creative source. Johanna is currently in the first year of her PhD and is writing her thesis on Greek-Armenian mystic G. I. Gurdjieff's little known piano and orchestral compositions, and his esoteric theories on music, vibration and the Law of Seven.

Eric Repphun recently completed his doctoral thesis in Religious Studies, entitled *Haunted: Religious Modernity and Reenchantment*. His academic interests are wide-ranging and interdisciplinary in nature. His research has long explored the intersections of religion and narrative popular culture in the Western context, contemporary film and literature in particular. He has done extensive work with the novels of Douglas Coupland and Chuck Palahniuk as well as on the films of Tom Tykwer and Terence Malick. He is currently a tutor, research assistant and Associate Lecturer at the University of Otago in Dunedin, New Zealand.

Mark Seton currently lectures in performing arts and media arts theory and practice at the Australian Film TV and Radio School. As an Honorary Research Associate of the Department of Performance Studies, University of Sydney, he offers consultation on ethical practices for documentation and digitisation of performance practices that are beyond traditional dance and theatre. Mark is an accredited teacher of InterPlay®, a creative practice nurturing spontaneity and community-building and he runs workshops in many different types of community settings. He is Chair of the Health Promotion subcommittee of the Australian Society for Performing Arts Healthcare (ASPAH).