

**“Why Do You Seek the Living Among the Dead?” (Luke 24:5):
On the Opacity of the Past and Transparency of the Contemporary**

Paper presented as part of a panel on the role of explanation in the study of early Christianity
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“It has been some time since the question of the origin of religion was seriously entertained. Today, there is little sign of the matter being resuscitated and once again becoming the focus of the lively debate of old. Looking back upon the bold speculations of their forefathers, contemporary scholars of religion seem to consider themselves to be in a new phase of scholarship, having learned, above all, not to ask impossible questions.” (Masuzawa 1993: 1)

On May 4, 2013, Steve Martin was the guest on National Public Radio’s game show, “Wait Wait... Don’t Tell Me”; during the initial interview, before he went on to answer three questions about boring people, he was asked about hosting the Oscars, which he’s now done three times (depending how you count co-hosting with Alec Baldwin, it’s two and a half). After remarking on how, in hindsight, each year the press reassesses the success of the previous year’s telecast, presumably to portray the upcoming Oscars as better than ever, Martin adds:

I’ve found that the critics will remember what they need for that year’s commentary.”¹

At least according to the man who brought us the revisionist history of his hit song “King Tut,” the remembered and even the documented past (in distinction, of course, from the immeasurably silent past that is now something less than dust) is an utterly plastic archive from which a variety of actors in the present can draw for their own continually changing purposes—not unlike my

own strategic isolation and then repetition of his one quotation, here today, from that now all-but-forgotten May 4, 2013, radio interview.

The moral of this tale? The past is continually invented anew for reasons that were, quite literally, previously unthought.

My question, then, is: If that wild and crazy guy—the one who rose to fame with balloon animals, an arrow through his head, and a pair of nose & glasses—understands this, then why don't scholars who continue to dig through those dusty archives in search of relics capable of transporting them back to the time of origins, when the ancestors walked the earth?

But because I fear my reputation, whatever it may be, slipping somewhat by opening a paper at such an austere occasion as this, focusing on such an obviously important topic as the history and origins of Christianity, by making reference to the star of “The Jerk”—and doing so as if all of the objects that we study are nothing more or less than comparable human cultural productions, making them analogically interchangeable in the service of a speaker with a point to make—let me begin anew, this time quoting the final paragraph, in full, from what I consider to be Bill Arnal's masterful little book, The Symbolic Jesus (2005):

And so perhaps the quest for the historical Jesus should be abandoned once again. Not because scholars cannot agree on their reconstructions; lack of agreement may only indicate that further—and more rigorous—work needs to be done. Not because the investigation has been biased; bias is unavoidable, here as elsewhere. Not even because reasonable conclusions are impossible in light of our defective sources, though this may indeed be the case. But because, ultimately, the historical Jesus does not matter, either for our understanding of the past, or our understanding of the present. The historically relevant and interesting causes of the development and growth of the Christian movement will be found, not in the person of Jesus, but in the collective machinations, agenda, and vicissitudes of the movement itself. And the Jesus who is important to our own day is not the Jesus of history but the symbolic Jesus of contemporary discourse. (77)

The thing that perplexes me, however, and which prompts me to pose a second question—related, I think, to the first—is how those who read and apparently agreed with Arnal when he

critiqued attempts to revive the quest for the historical Jesus—writing such lines as “we [as scholars] are still human beings, and we in the humanities especially engage in the generation of human meanings, in the production of worldviews, in the pensée sauvage that organizes the universe around us” (74)—could so effectively insulate from his critique their own attempt to organize the universe by means of a quest for the origins of not just Jesus but of Christianity itself. So at the heart of the explanatory efforts of this thing called “Christian origins” I see either a contradiction or an equivocation—either way, it results in an unwillingness or an inability (whether intentional or structural, I’m not yet sure) to take such critiques where readers such as I (and perhaps Steve Martin) think they ought to go: to a critique of the very logic that postulates the existence of some coherent thing that, referring back to Arnal’s wording, develops and grows over time—this thing called Christianity or, as he renames it, “the Christian movement.”

To restate: if, as Arnal argues, and I wholeheartedly agree, “[w]e are mythmakers ourselves even in our analysis of myth” and if, as he then immediately adds,

[i]n our reproductions of the historical Jesus, we are doing essentially the same thing as the gospel writers did, whether or not we are Christians or even attracted to the figure of Jesus: we are projecting our own beliefs onto a story (history) and so using narrative (or a sort) to create a myth. (74)

then how is it possible to protect quests for the ancient origins of this thing called “the Christian movement” from this insightful critique? For despite the obvious difference between the speculations concerning the individualized person of Jesus, on the one hand, and the thoroughly social, but no less imagined, historical context of ancient Palestine, on the other, in both cases our discourse is deeply embedded in the sort of anachronistic, self-serving projects that Arnal finds so unhelpful in Jesus research and which Steve Martin finds so rampant among Hollywood reporters. For not just the ancient people but also the ancient context in which they lived (whether semantic, economic, or architectural) have long since turned to silent dust or tattered

manuscript fragments that do not come with either highlighting or helpful interpretive instructions, suggesting—to adapt Arnal’s words, just quoted—that our reproductions of not just the historical Jesus but also an ancient thing called “the Christian movement” are doing essentially the same thing as we today think the gospel writers did; in fact, just in presuming that there is an obvious place at the start of some narrative on “the Christian movement” for such complex characters as “the gospel writers” we may well be doing the very mythologizing that historically and socially rigorous scholars of myth somehow think they are avoiding.

Put most bluntly, for those who have (in my opinion, justifiable) difficulties with the manner in which a noun such as “Christianity”—let alone “the gospel writers”—conveys the (for some, strategically useful) impression of a stable and uniform identity moving smoothly across time, switching to investigating the equally antique origins of the seemingly more dynamic “Christian movement” does not suffice. For a curiously ahistorical essentialism yet persists, despite immersing our work in the imagery of motion. The problem, here, of course, is with the discourse on origins itself, if it presumes that it is somehow transcending the scholar’s own interests and situation, leaving the orbit of the game we alone play, and somehow corresponding to something of significance in the seemingly historic thing itself. That quests for the holy grail now strike us worthwhile only in movie scripts, and that quests for the source of the Nile seem quaintly colonial and outdated, yet we persist in trying to account for the development and growth either of Christianity or the so-called Christian movement by reconstructing either the original authorial intentions or social contexts from out of which “it” arose, is the problem that needs our attention.

With the Nile in mind, my problem with origins discourses is in the manner in which we disguise our own criteria and choices, as scholars, when deciding which tributary, which stream,

which spring and which trickle, ought to gain pride of place when it comes to tracing the source of that river's flow. For even an ardent realist will have to admit that a host of non-watery criteria need to be brought into the conversation if we are to somehow distinguish which of the water that eventually heads northward to the Mediterranean is more authentically or legitimately "the Nile"; after all, the Nile presumably has as many sources as spots up-river (whether a kilometer south of the delta or a thousand) where run-off has pooled together and headed downstream under the relentless force of gravity, no? What's more, while this seemingly empirical thing called "the Nile" may be more than apparent to observers at the delta, at what point between the imagined source—correction, the virtually innumerable imagined sources, few of which will ever be found—and its termination does this seemingly uniform thing, "the Nile," become apparent or even come into being? When would one be "in the Nile" if one began one's journey from somewhere far south? To jump continents: presumably every single trickle within the huge expanse of the Mississippi River run-off is the "source" of the Mississippi River, no? So what sense does it even make to head off on a quest northward, into the heart of the North American continent, to find the origin of that river?

Switching from river sources to explaining the, as Arnal phrased it, development and growth of Christianity by reference to its ancient social setting, in portraying one (or two or three—how many is enough?) of the innumerable settings (all of which are now dust) as the context that must be recovered we likewise mask the choices and interests that allow modern scholars to narrow the field to just what they wish to talk about (the sort of choice early explorers had to make when going upstream and coming upon the first fork in their mysterious river). That narrowing the all-but-limitless field that we know as "the past" is necessary for any sort of conversation to take place—akin to using string grids at a archeological dig that, though

arbitrary, create a setting in which we can then talk about some this in relation to that—is something that I take as inevitable and uncontroversial, of course; recognizing that this narrowing requires choice, interests, curiosities, and point of view alien to the object of study itself is, however, lost when the seemingly ancient context we have created by means of our contemporary grids, which allows certain objects to stand out as interesting things worth reading (i.e., this is a “Christian” text vs. that which is a “Jewish” text), is taken as given instead of being but an instance of our own thoroughly modern if/then game. For if gender or class, as we define them, are important to us then we can say this or that about the things from the past that happen to have survived for who knows what all reasons.

So for those advocating that we own our curiosities and recognize the self-made and self-referential nature of the scholarly game that we are all playing, the assumption that a careful reading of the sources will shed new light on the Nile’s source is seen to be a particularly troublesome approach, one that universalizes local, situationally-specific interests and the objects in the world that those interests make it possible to discuss and analyze—thereby mis-portraying discursive objects created from within virtually limitless context-upon-context as if they were naturally found, authentic items merely placed within a backdrop vista (i.e., what I would call the method of “reading a text in its context”), a portrait that erases the artist’s or the reader’s hand in multiple ways (a critique so nicely made, with reference to the portraits of Jesus, all throughout Arnal’s The Symbolic Jesus). I think here of a plenary address delivered by Jonathan Z. Smith at the Atlanta meeting of the American Academy of Religion (October 31, 2010).² Introduced by then AAR President, Ann Taves, Smith’s lecture, entitled “Reading Religion: A Life in Scholarship,” consistently emphasized reading—whether a text or an artifact—as a mediation between an ambiguous world and an interested reader, rather than portraying scholarship as an

experiential immediacy that passively results from some self-evidently organized and thus inherently significant object or domain that simply (appealing again to those old school phenomenologists of religion) presents itself to our senses. As an illustration of this point, consider the following anecdote Smith tells (quoting from the 35:09 point forward):

Through the years my chief mode of travel has been to go to the library or to my bookshelves. Although I've written a good bit about place, I've never had the slightest desire to see for myself the places I've described. I've relied, rather, on published sources: photographs, sketches, verbal descriptions, maps, diagrams. Once, with Elaine, by accident, I found myself before an unknown, rather confusing, building in the old city in Jerusalem. When told that it was in fact the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, a site to which I had devoted a chapter of a book, I went no further inside, remarking, "I prefer my church to theirs."

After brief laughter from his audience, Smith drove home his point:

This is to say—and I'm serious about this—this is to say, as I wrote in the conclusion of "When the Chips are Down,"³ I have consistently made a choice of the map over the territory. Although you may well disagree, it has been a self-limitation that, for me, yields cognitive gain.

What I have most come to appreciate in Smith's work is his constant attention to choice and the contingency of setting—summed up in the metaphor of a map that, at all costs, is not to be confused with being some neutral or disinterested presentation of an actual place (i.e., territory). Whatever the territory may actually be, we do not know, of course, since we can't get there from here but by means of an abstraction that we call our map (i.e., careful listeners will have noticed that Smith doesn't say "the church" but "theirs" versus "my"⁴), a map that opens room for interpretation and ambiguity, all of which allows us to think into existence a series of relationships in time and space—again, like that string grid at the site of a dig—such as the idea of some here as opposed to a there, or some now as opposed to a then that is far beyond eyesight and memory—but, of course, never further than our imaginations since (like Arnal's symbolic Jesus) it is the product of our virtually unlimited imagination! And that there are many,

potentially competing, imaginations at work, each with different curiosities and choices (from Reza Aslan and Bill O'Reilly to many others—at least when it comes to Jesus), all in different settings, all vying for the right to be seen as representing some definitive territory, is one of the gains of this approach, as I see it, for now we can study not just the continual construction of place or identity but also the competition for authorization among multiple places and identities. For, now the church is always someone's imagined representation, a representation that, in some situations, happens to have been so successfully authorized as to erase the agents who put it front and center in the first place. (Despite routinely talking about this thing we call “the law,” anyone who took a civics course knows how laws in a social democracy are made and that they are, in fact, always someone's—their law, our law, etc.—inasmuch as they are the result of interests, lobbyists, proposals, deals, amendments, compromises, votes, and, of course, wealth.)

But I find that admitting ownership over our creations (e.g., their church vs. mine), is not very common in the study of religion, even when we think we're cognizant of the role played by assumptions and theory. (It is so uncommon, in fact, that I have no doubt that Smith's frank acknowledgment of it might have caught many in the audience off-guard, thus prompting their laughter at that point in his lecture—for I conjecture that many in attendance certainly knew which of the two churches was the real one and laughed at something akin to what they saw as Smith's disarming admission of his own adorable hubris—something that I tend to think prompted him, in return, to up the ante by adding “and I'm serious about this...” to preface the conclusion he draws from the anecdote.) For instance, consider the well-known changes that have taken place over the past few academic generations in the work of a sub-group of scholars who no longer identify themselves simply as New Testament scholars but, instead, refer to themselves as scholars of Christian origins. (I won't even dare try to spin a narrative on the

origins of that schism but I find the papers by Merrill Miller, Ron Cameron, Burton Mack, Jonathan Z. Smith, and John Kloppenborg and first published in MTSR 8/3 [1996] to be an early watershed moment for those intent on disassociating what are now seen as two separate enterprises.) Whereas the former study the text, as made evident by their disciplinary name, to determine its meaning, the latter distinguish themselves by their interest instead in the social world, the context, from which the text and the movement arose, trying to explain, among other things, the origins of the documents that, over time, came to be known as the New Testament, rather than simply taking the New Testament narrative for granted and using it to understand the movements (whether that is a singular or plural possessive, I leave to you to decide) development and growth. As with all name changes, this revision in nomenclature signals important differences for those invested in these exercises—New Testament scholars are, in my estimation, akin to classical Humanists in many ways, being exegetes and hermeneuts intent on finding timeless meaning in texts (regardless whether they take what might be termed the inevitable theological step to determine “what the text means for me, in my life”), whereas those working in Christian origins generally see themselves, instead, as more social scientifically-inclined, explanatory theorists, working not with the vagaries of ethereal meaning but toiling on the far firmer ground of social theories of religion. Or so it seems, for despite the shift to the historical and the social (i.e., examining the specificities of the turn-of-the-era Mediterranean world) from the ahistorical (i.e., interpreting the meaning of the text that somehow coheres across the ages and across different readers), there is something unsatisfying about this apparent change: a missed opportunity to accept ownership.

The problem, as I’ve already suggested, is the inevitably anachronistic manner in which that thing that we call the past is managed so as to transform it into something that can be

understood in terms of causal sequences and end points known only to those of us standing at the river's delta, a process whereby, as I have argued, contemporary criteria, choices, and priorities are inevitably retrojected either upriver or backward in time—but not as modern stipulations and heuristics that scholars must inevitably use, or as a result of what are acknowledged to be contemporary curiosities (i.e., the relatively uncontroversial claim, I think, that we have no choice but to confront the limitless, the unknown, through the limited and the known—for, as Jonathan Smith has phrased it, “maps are all we possess” [see note 4]). Instead, the trouble is the manner in which scholars continue to ontologize and thereby authorize the contemporary, taking the world-as-it-happens-to-be-now and representing it as the world-as-it-always-was and necessarily-must-be—akin to scholars who critique colonialism for inventing the idea of “Hinduism” yet who nonetheless understand the Rg Veda as a Hindu text and who open their historical surveys of Indian religion with images of cross-legged yogis found somewhere in what we now call the ancient Indus River Valley. To come back to our example of Christian origins, despite the apparent difference from their New Testament colleagues, the stable item that stands at the center of both exercises is this thing called Christianity (whether noun or adjective, whether static or in motion), conceived in both cases as a transcendental entity that, apparently, has an origin (no matter whether you quibble over mono- or polygenesis) and a trajectory—the so-called thing to which Burton Mack points in the opening lines to his agenda-setting essay on redescribing Christian origins: “For almost two thousand years,” he writes, “the Christian imagination of Christian origins has echoed the gospel stories contained in the New Testament...” (1996: 247). For despite the apparent priority that text takes in the former and context takes in the latter, these two pursuits both presuppose that each is simply a medium in which some prior thing (either meaning or imagination) continually and developmentally

manifests itself from age to age. In the case of old school New Testament studies this critique may be a little more apparent to some who are present today, inasmuch as the goal of these studies, determining the meaning of the text, is thought somehow to float free of real history, as if artful, modern interpreters were time travelling when they made statements about what, for example, long dead Saint Paul did or did not mean when he—yes, Paul—wrote this or that in his very own hand (1 Cor. 16:21)—or at least the discursive hand of the reader’s imagination.

Yet (somewhat like the shift from “Christianity” to “the Christian movement”) making the move that comes with admitting into consideration the importance of context for “properly” explaining the success of an ancient movement—and, to do so, learning about, say, this or that Greco-Roman practice or ancient Jewish belief in order to get at a better understanding of early Christians—hardly improves anything since we still find ourselves working to roll back stones and resurrect a long lost origin, whether it be an original intention of a long dead author or the social features of an originary landscape long ago erased from the face of the earth (and whose topographical features are therefore no less reconstituted from, yes..., modern readers reading a variety of things that, following Derrida, we might just as well call texts—whether they derive from a stylus of some sort or a potter’s wheel). So whether it is a New Testament scholar interpreting or a Christian origins scholar explaining, neither, it seems to me, have left their library armchair in the present, even when they go on their obligatory—because it now credentials them—dig for a few weeks one summer. For they always and inevitably bring their string with them wherever they go, and lay it in a grid of their own making, a grid that follows the conventions of their peers, before they go about making sense of the universe by figuring out what to pay attention to, what to ignore, and what not only comes before but also causes what.

To sum up: despite how progressive some may portray it, Christian origins’ explanatory

efforts suffer from trying to reconstruct the social world from out of which some bubbling and flowing movement that today strikes us as coherent somehow arose by reading yet more texts so as to reconstruct the context from out of which the very texts they read arose; what's more, it also implies taking the presumption of Christianity's existence (defined however) for granted as a virtually Hegelian Geist that was somehow there at its own birth. For despite their attempt at far more nuanced and historically-grounded scholarship, a Christian origins scholar's work is possible only if we so naturalize the existence of what we today know as Christianity that we can retroject it backward, confident that, like the British working class in E. P. Thompson's famous line that opened the Preface to his The Making of the English Working Class (1991), it was somehow there at its own birth. While the realist in me certainly assumes that there were people in the recent as well as ancient past doing all sorts of things (whether we're talking about London in what we call the nineteenth century, as in the case of Thompson's work, or the first century of the common era in the part of the world we today call Israel or Palestine), the careful historian in me would argue not just that a shared class consciousness came long after those early modern behaviors and economic relationships that eventually were taken by scholars to be its source but also that neither the self-designation "Christian" nor the identity that it supposedly names were present at their supposed origin. What's more, this marker has been used over the years—let alone today—to signify so many different things in so many different situations that generalizing it to be some overarching, transhistorical identity, that had a source and a uniform developmental trajectory—e.g., "the history of Christianity" they call it—is the sign of either terribly sloppy scholarship or an example of invested scholarship engaged in its own identity formation practices (in a word, let's follow Arnal and just call it myth). Put simply, and for some, perhaps, uncontroversially, the more careful historian, or genealogist, in me would argue strongly that

there were no Christians at the origins of Christianity, making “Christian origins” an oxymoron whose contradiction remains unseen only so long as one is untroubled by the practice of doing history qua self-beneficial and socially formative anachronism.

Take, for example, debates over what people who are on their own origins quest refer to as “the earliest Christian documents.” If, as a number of scholars now think, the self-designation “Christian” was not used (or we at least do not have material evidence of its use) prior to Ignatius of Antioch (sometime around 100 of the common era) then would a document written before that time, if read into its “proper” context, even be considered “an early Christian document” without risking the anachronism of retrojecting, say, either his own or perhaps what we now think was Ignatius’s social/self-understanding to occasions long before? And given what Ignatius’s social/self-understanding for what Χριστιανισμός might have signified for him (i.e., Christianity), how is homogenizing such an early appearance of this term with any of its subsequent uses (e.g., the manner in which I just juxtaposed an ancient Greek term with a modern English one by means of the simple Latin translator “id est,” as if there is an easily recognized interchangeability to them), let alone homogenizing both with the appearance of the term Χριστιανός in the Book of Acts (11:26), the mark of a careful, situationally-specific historian? Simply put, why do we (and it is we who are doing this, not the objects themselves) even presume that these three otherwise distinct items—i.e., one among many modern notions of Christianity, that of a fellow named Ignatius, and the Book of Acts—are somehow obviously or necessarily related in some genetic manner?

The problem we encounter here is failing to study the multiple identifying practices themselves (in a word, discourses), that are always in some present rather than taking for granted the social worlds that result from their successful implementation (i.e., those seeming things we

subsequently call identities or traditions). For if we studied the former instead of the latter for granted, then every signifying act involving the designation “Christian” or the invocation of the name of a certain author (start with my own citation of Smith, Arnal, Ignatius, or Steve Martin, for that matter, let alone Paul, as in “Paul wrote...” or “Paul believed...”) would be a moment when a specific sort of identity was being coalesced all over again, for a strategic and situationally-specific set of purposes, and we would no longer look toward the time when either the gospel-writers or even the founders of a now distinct academic exercise known as Christian origins walked the earth as being when some definitive big bang occurred and whose animating momentum somehow yet ripples through their tattered old documents (or are they our always current documents?—now that’s an ownership question, one that shows we’re taking the death of the author seriously, for how can origins discourses be anything but propaganda in light of such critiques?). We instead would look to ourselves, today, at this very conference, as being those who are actively constituting these very identities—in our talk about them as being something other than our talk about them. Making this shift to studying identification as an ongoing, always-in-the-present exercise (a shift that a group of us, at what we call Culture on the Edge,⁵ are working hard to make in a consistent and rigorous manner), focuses our attention on the “i.e.”—the Latin id est—in my previous paragraph, the ease with which one translates and moves between what are otherwise entirely discrete (potentially competing or maybe even contradictory) uses and situations (let alone language systems: ancient Greek, Latin, and English); it is a move that, if undetected, creates the impression of uniform tradition, heritage, and identity—the result being, in our case, this thing called “the Christian movement,” perhaps?—doing so by glossing over the many possible gaps between some ancient use of “Χριστιανισμός” and a modern use of “Christianity” (let alone the many conflicting modern uses

of the term, such as those students who still sometimes tell me that Catholics are not Christians). For despite my cavalier use of “id est,” just above, in many ways the ancient “that,” which is something I can quite literally only imagine, was most probably not the same as some contemporary “this” (or contemporary “these”), which prompts us to ask what scale of value we are choosing—it is our choice, after all—to use in order to manage the competing similarities and differences in the objects that we so casually isolate, translate, and then relate to each other, as if they are all naturally members of one big happy family. Where is the trace of those who made these choices, those who determined the features and the limits of that kin group, and what do we know of the consequences of their actions? Who owns it all? Simply put, whose church is it?

For all the seeming progressivism, I therefore find that scholars studying context-oriented Christian origins are generally not asking such self-implicating questions of historically specific situation and agency. Akin to those theologically-inclined colleagues from whom they try so hard (but, according to my analysis, fail) to distance themselves, they are instead actively involved in constituting the timeless, essential object that they think they are historicizing—something evident in the heavy recurrence of the past tense in their work, which is none other than a way that we grammatically cover our tracks.

The “different way to account for the emergence of early Christianity” (quoting Cameron [1996: 241]) offered by Christian origins is therefore not nearly as different as many of us think it to be—a critique not dissimilar to one I offered just a couple years ago at the SBL when looking at the work of so-called secular Bible critics who were, it turned out, just as interested in correct meaning and exegesis as those theologians with whom they so vehemently disagreed (there are so many Bibles, with so many differences between them, that I admit I’m still a little

puzzled which one they meant when they kept talking about the Bible meaning this or that); those seeking to understand the development and growth of Christianity by placing some transcendental “it” into its proper originary context would therefore be well advised to heed Smith’s comments on the costs of this enterprise, made back in 1996: what he termed the opacity of the past and transparency of the contemporary (1996: 272); instead, why not study the creation of ever-changing and always competing contexts—thereby taking seriously that old saying about never stepping into the same river twice—by those who work in the present’s archives of the past, whereby some generic item either becomes, for us or others, Christian or not, either to be linked sequentially with other items similarly classified as Christian or not. Studying the continual reinvention of this thing we call “the Christian imagination” or “the Christian movement” requires studying identification practices and priorities in the always nimble present—where a text and reader inevitably meet—rather than seeking the living among the ancient dead. And if this is the alternative approach that we take, then—to quote Arnal’s own conclusion, but with a slight, though I think logical, adaptation—we will find that the Christian origins which is important to our own day is not the Christian origins of history but the symbolic Christian origins of contemporary discourse.

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¹ Listen to the episode here: <http://www.npr.org/2013/05/04/180815696/not-my-job-steve-martin-takes-a-quiz-about-boring-people> (accessed October 12, 2013).

² For those who were unable to attend in person, the full lecture can be found at: http://aarweb.org/Meetings/Videos/2010Atlanta/2010_A31-137.asp (accessed May 14, 2013).

³ This essay—which Smith refers to as a “bio-bibliographical essay” (2004: 1)—opens his collection, Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion (2004).

⁴ As Smith himself writes in the closing line of “Map is Not Territory” : “but maps are all we possess” (1978: 309).

⁵ See edge.ua.edu for examples of this group’s work; its members include (along with myself): Craig Martin, Monica Miller, Steven Ramey, K. Merinda Simmons, Leslie Dorrrough Smith, and Vaia Touna. We are joined by Andie Alexander, who helps to manage the blog.