The Place of Truth

ISRLC Conference 2018

Presentations panel by panel including abstracts

JUDAISM

Friday (28 Sept) 1:00-2:30 PM: Judaism panel – session I

Serena Baldari: Magic, Truth and "the Others" in the Babylonian Talmud: The Jewish Tradition as Mediator - Between Relativist and Fundamentalist Approaches to Truth.

Monotheistic religions are often attributed an inherently intolerant and violent potential because they claim monopoly on truth. A study of the Talmudic portrayal(s) of magic, however, reveals a conception of truth that is more complex than what is typically assumed of monotheistic traditions. The first and most apparent way in which magic is portrayed in the Talmud is as a crime. Magic is explicitly forbidden in the Hebrew Bible and the punishment for it in the Mishnah is death by stoning. The halakhic discussion on magic however, although faithful to the Biblical prohibition, opens already in the Mishnah a small window for magic to enter the rabbinic school house. For though magic (כשפים) is confirmed as illegal, it is also portrayed as real. It is not that magic is a lie, an illusion created by masters of deception, and because of that it is a crime. In fact, optical illusions that look like magic, but are not real, although they too are forbidden, are not to be punished by death like real magic. Furthermore, in the many rabbinic interactions with magic described in the BT, magical power is not portrayed as intrinsically evil. On the contrary: magical power comes from God and demonstrations of magic are proof of closeness to God. My study suggests that the seeming dissonance between legislation, theology and ethics in the portrayal of magic as illegal, but real and not essentially wrong, reflects a complexity in the negotiation of boundaries and processes of self-identification in relation to internal and external "others" developed in the Rabbinic tradition. I propose that this complexity favoured in the Jewish religious tradition offers means for rethinking truth and provides alternatives to the chaotic implications of relativism and the violent inclinations of fundamentalism.

Joshua Edelman: Testimonial theatre and post-secular truth claims

Theatre, perhaps because of its live and embodied form, has wrestled with questions of truth, honesty, fiction and deception since classical times. In recent decades, an important move in this wrestling match has been the development of so-called 'testimonial theatre', in which performers offer the audience (supposedly) non-fictional accounts of their own experience. Developed, in different forms, by American monologists such as Spalding Gray and by South African artists responding to the techniques and goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, this form has since been most developed in Britain, where it encountered and overlapped with an existing tradition of verbatim theatre (where all lines are taken from court transcripts, diaries, interviews or other primary sources).

But testimony is not reportage, I argue, and the affective and compelling truth claims of live theatre ordinarily rest not on textual accuracy, but the empathetic connection between performer and spectator. I argue that the truth claims of non-fictional theatre are best understood as a post-secular form of testimony and witnessing, which carry with them moral and legal implications and obligations that stem from these concepts' religious and theological roots. Against these moral and legal stands a notion of artistic or personal autonomy. A study of the tension between these two forces can reveal a

good deal about how we understand truth claims grounded more in personal identity than in documentable facts, a common feature of what has been called the 'post-truth' era.

To explore these tensions, I will make use of two recent controversies invoked by testimonial theatre. The first is Mike Daisey's The Agony and the Ecstasy of Steve Jobs, a testimonial piece about Daisey's love of Apple products and his visit to China to understand how they were made, not all of which was reported accurately in the piece. The second, more problematic, example, is Caryl Churchil's Seven Jewish Children, a short play written in response to the 2008 Israeli invasion of Gaza. While it does not claim non-fictional status, it presents a narrative history of the State of Israel through the struggle of seven generations of Jewish parents to decide what to tell their children. The uproar that the piece created is best understood, I argue, by looking at the piece a (national) testimony, and the pieces written in response to it as forms of counter-testimony.

Marianne Schleicher: Onto-epistemological differences in approaches to gender and love in the Hebrew Bible and Early Rabbinic Literature

Humanist and posthumanist ontologies struggle right now for dominance in late modern academia with relevance for its many disciplines, including Jewish studies. The purpose of this paper is therefore to illustrate the epistemological consequences of two different ontologies and discuss the subsequent knowledge claims that we can make as well as the possibility of their compatibility.

The discussion will rest on a brief introduction to constructionist and new materialist approaches, as they reflect respectively humanist and posthumanist ontologies, and a brief analysis of legal texts and narratives about genderqueer bodies and love in the Hebrew Bible and early Rabbinic literature. The analysis will compare constructionist and new materialist approaches. As the paper will argue, Michel Foucault's and Judith Butler's constructionist approaches are very efficient when accounting for cultural regulations of gender and love, whereas they are reluctant to address the effects of materiality because both hold that materiality is always-already embedded in discourse when addressed. In contrast, representatives of new materialism such as Donna Haraway, Karen Barad, and Elizabeth Grosz have presented theories and methodological consequences that enable an address of the effects of materiality. While humanist and posthumanist ontologies are incompatible, I shall nevertheless make a diffractive attempt to transpose constructionist insights into new materialist approaches to enable analyses of the many effectual connections between discourse and embodied material protests against normative gender and love in Israelite-Jewish texts that indicate how discourse and materiality are entangled. It will be argued that Jewish studies in general need this diffractive transposition just as this brief analysis needs it to be able to address the agency of materiality and how material agency in the course of Jewish religion, literature and culture has affected adjustments in terminology, in discourses on gender and love, in emerging tolerances of deviating bodies, and even in occasional instances of their inclusion.

Saturday (29 Sept) 3:20-4:50 PM: Judaism panel – session II

Jonathan Harmat: Separating truth from faith – Spinoza's dogmas of the universal religion

According to the grammar of Semitic languages, the Hebrew word *emeth* אמת (thuth) and the Hebrew word *emunah* אמונה (trustworthiness, fidelity, faith) share a common root and are intimately linked in the Jewish intellectual tradition. At its apex, this tradition conceived the philosophical search for truth and religious faith as two compatible intellectual endeavours (e.g. Maimonides). This paper wants to examine how the exilic experience of Iberian *marranos* and their descendants constitutes a decisive intellectual break with that tradition by focussing on Baruch Spinoza's *Tractatus Theologico Politicus* in 1670.

First, I wish to outline Spinoza's argument for distinguishing between *truth* (אמת *veritas*) which resides in the domain of philosophy from *faith* (אמונה *fides*) which resides in the domain of religion. Spinoza argues that they adhere to two distinct logics, comprised of different means and which have different goals, which will be uncovered.

Following the tradition of Maimonides, Albo, and Abarbanel, however, Spinoza stipulated a universal religion (*fides universalis*) characterized by a final set of dogmas. As a number of scholars have made clear, the seven dogmas contradict the very teachings of Spinoza's own *Ethics* (Smith 1997, Rosenthal 2001, Nadler 2011, Frank & Waller 2016).

I will attempt to explain this apparent contradiction by showing (a) that the dogmas of faith are void of *truth* in the philosophical sense, and (b) that their value derive from the fact that they bring about obedient behavior. Finally, I will discuss whether severing the epistemic ties between *truth* from *faith* creates a more tolerant state of affairs and thus a more workable solution to religious conflicts today.

Dustin Atlas: "Mendelssohn on imperfection and truth"

If Medieval Jewish thought—from Maimonides to Judah Abravanel—is organized around the notion of perfection, I will argue that Modern Jewish philosophy, exemplified by Moses Mendelssohn, is epitomized by an attentiveness to imperfection—meaning: it takes as given that thought is incomplete and compromised. Any relationship to truth must not seek to overcome imperfection and compromise, but proceed through them.

Most contemporary philosophies are philosophies of finitude. But there are different ways to navigate this finitude. Kantian thinking (and the traditions that derive from it) are concerned with limits and borders, and 'truth' a matter of negotiating the border separating us from things-in-themselves. This tends to pitch us either into skepticism, or the endless play of appearances.

Mendelssohn, whose writings precede, but overlap, Kant's, developed a competing Jewish philosophy of finitude, based not on limitation, but imperfection. Mendelssohn transforms the notion of perfection, which he inherits from the rationalists, such that human imperfection becomes not a mark of human inadequacy, but rather, a creative force; catalyzing the development of those things that give value to human life (beauty, politics, and religion).

What this entails will be developed by a close reading of passages from *Jerusalem* and *Morning Hours*. Here we find a valorization of an philosophical existence that not only accounts for imperfection, but is in fact driven by it. From Mendelssohn's perspective, imperfection is not an obstacle to truth but a spur for an infinite process truth-development. An epistemology of imperfection begins from the assumption that we are composite beings, and that intellectual development is thus a collective affair as much as a personal one. Where Idealism is uncompromising, a Jewish philosophy of imperfection begins from the assumption that truth is a matter of trust, and that we are, structurally speaking, already compromised. And these are desirable things. In this sense, and somewhat counterintuitively, the philosophy of imperfection inaugurated by Mendelssohn and developed within the contours of Modern Jewish thought is far more pragmatic than many competing contemporaneous epistemologies, and better able to help us rejuvenate the notion of truth.

Marta Zając: Faces of Truth in Jewish Thought. From Confusion to Love

In *Ten (Possible) Reasons for the Sadness of Thought*, George Steiner remarks that it is thought which has become for man the space of his exile from Paradise. Man wanders, moves on in a meaningless way, never to reach again the former unity of the word and the world.

The crisis that truth has undergone in recent times is frequently attributed to the influence that postmodern thinkers exert on contemporary thought. After all, postmodernism presents itself as an attack on Western metaphysics and what deconstruction deconstructs in the first place is the delusion of truth as a stable system of meaning production and fossilization. It may be then both interesting and revealing to note that in Jacques Derrida's view, as he elaborates the problem in *Des Tours de Babel*, the biblical God's name is *balal* (confusion) and in this sense Babel precedes Sinai as a place of God's self-revelation. In other words, Derrida makes recourse to Hebrew metaphysics to support his idea of truth which always resides outside a system. What Derrida in this way rightly underscores is the contrary directions that Greek and Hebrew metaphysics assumed. Greek and biblical *Logos* do not stand for the same. But the truth that Derrida opposes has all the characteristics of a cold, abstract

system, while truth in the biblical sense is the presence which supports and protects. It is the unity of *logos, ethos* and – *pathos*.

In this paper I confront the aforementioned *aporias* with two elementary meanings of the Hebrew root *'mn* (on the one hand, firm ground, foundation; on the other – loyalty, trust, belief) and the way in which they meet in the verb "to care" and the noun "a nurse". In my view, it is the latter characteristics of truth: love and care, which alone may appeal to contemporary man, who struggles with the invasion of chaos and the fear of the regime alike. Besides Derrida, I will discuss in this respect A.J. Heschel and M.-A. Ouaknin.

POSTCOLONIAL

Saturday (29 Sept) 1:30-3:00 PM: Postcolonial panel – session I

William F. Purcell: Polygamy and Christianity Revisited: Fidelis Odun Balogun's Intertextual Dialogue with T.M. Aluko's *One Man, One Wife* in 'Parable of a Great Grandson'

The conflict between Western Christianity and the indigenous cultures into which it has been introduced by European missionaries has long been a thematic subject in literary texts emanating from the African continent, particularly among the so-called first generation of writers who came of age during the colonial period. Prominent amongst writings on this subject is the thorny issue of traditional marriage practices, particularly polygamy, versus mission Christianity's demand for monogamy as a condition for admission to baptism. Fidelis Odun Balogun's 1995 story, 'Parable of a Great Grandson,' in part offers a more contemporary reflection on this issue by a second-generation writer. Challenging the missionaries' blanket rejection of polygamy as a potential form of Christian marriage, Balogun's text suggests that in certain circumstances this rejection itself is in conflict with the spirit and demands of the Gospel. As he explores this theme Balogun's text engages in an intertextual dialogue with earlier Nigerian texts that explore this conflict, particularly T. M. Aluko's 1958 novel, *One Man, One Wife*.

This presentation will examine the nature and purpose of marriage in the specifically Yoruba cultural context of Balogun's and Aluko's texts. Against this background it will trace the historical development in the West of the doctrine of monogamy as the only acceptable form of Christian marriage. Employing the insights of missiology and contextual theology, it will then seek to examine the 'truth' of these fictions' assertions about certain forms of polygamous marriage as being consistent with the Gospel.

Mark Dennis: Investigating Textual Value through the Lens of Tsuda Sōkichi's Research on the *Shōmangyō-gisho*

This presentation will take up a key historical debate involving Japanese historians and scholars of Buddhism about quite different views of how to value the *Shōmangyō-gisho*, a Buddhist text written in classical Chinese that has traditionally been attributed to Japan's Prince Shōtoku (574-622). This text appears in the Japanese version of the Buddhist canon and has been crucial to the development of an indigenous form of Japanese Buddhism.

In the 1930s and 40s, the historian Tsuda Sōkichi (1873-1961) produced scholarship questioning the credibility of the earliest Japanese historical texts that attribute the *Shōmangyō-gisho* to Shōtoku. This scholarship, for which he was convicted of blaspheming the cultural heritage of Japan, appeared against the backdrop of Japanese colonial expansion during which Japanese elites began devaluing the country's clear cultural debt owed to China and Korea. But in the post-war period, when scholars and activists were freed from imperialist orthodoxy, Tsuda's work became the basis for a scholarly trend of attacking the text's value by rejecting Shōtoku as its legitimate author.

Subsequent work by other scholars built on Tsuda's foundation by questioning the text's value in other important ways. For instance, Fujieda Akira, a scholar of Buddhism, identified two partial

manuscripts from among the cache of texts discovered in the caves of Dunhuang that are strikingly similar to and clearly predate the *Shōmangyō-gisho*. This discovery set in motion a fascinating and heated debate that continues in the present day about how to properly value the text. While Tsuda and Fujieda, amongst others, dismiss the *Shōmangyō-gisho* as apocryphal and unoriginal, proponents of the "true-composition-hypothesis" have spent great intellectual effort seeking to justify the text's value in light of these criticisms. This paper will examine the history of this debate and draw conclusions about "value and valuation by approaching questions of truth from diverse cultural perspectives."

Alicia Broggi: Storytelling and the Feeling of Truth in J.M. Coetzee's *Elizabeth Costello*

In *Elizabeth Costello* (2003), J.M. Coetzee expressly raises questions about the truths that storytelling can and should tell, and about the vocation of a writer in times of cultural change. He raises these questions within a story, which makes reference to key moments of cultural change while also drawing upon a surprising (and at times seemingly antiquated) religious vocabulary. From fresh archival evidence, unveiled at the University of Texas at Austin's Harry Ransom Center in 2013, we also know that Coetzee had personally explored the rhetorical techniques by which other storytellers have effected changes in the presuppositions and sensibilities that shape how their audience approach "truth". By examining photocopied excerpts from his readings on one particular storyteller from Africa, St. Augustine, this paper will trace Coetzee's self-reflective use of similar rhetorical strategies in his own writings. Augustine is a noteworthy interlocutor not only for his influence on the Christian tradition and its spread, but also for his own seminal work of literary autobiography. This paper begins by describing Coetzee's exploration of how Augustine used stories to effect change in his audience's ideas and feelings about "truth". It then investigates his own processes of revising and reimagining those storytelling techniques in *Elizabeth Costello* to facilitate literary innovations aimed at effecting changes in how readers approach "truth" in a dramatically changing world, where old feelings and beliefs at times impede perceptions of new situations.

Sunday (30 Sept) 11:00-12:30 AM: Postcolonial panel – session II

Carool Kersten: Knowledge & Power, Truth & Method in the 'Post-postcolonial' Hermeneutics of Hamid Dabashi

This paper builds on my earlier research on the Iranian-born but US-based cultural critic and sociologist of knowledge Hamid Dabashi. It traces how his 'hermeneutics of alterity', laid out in *Being a Muslim in the World* (2012), which evolved out of earlier books such as *Islamic Liberation Theology* (2008) and *Post-Orientalism* (2009), has led to the advocacy of a disposition that he calls 'worldly cosmopolitanism'.

  He has used this constructively in *The World of Persian Literary Humanism* (2012) and *Persophilia* (2015) to draw attention to classical Persian poets as historical instances exhibiting this disposition in the Muslim world and mimicking of its underlying values by European literati.

  The Hermeneutics of Alterity is thus also employed subversively. Drawing on the political philosophies of Hannah Arendt and Giorgio Agamben, and influenced by the hermeneutics of Hans-Georg Gadamer, as well as the post-structuralism of Gianni Vattimo (in particular his notion of 'weak thought'), Dabashi's enduring concerns consist in political questions regarding the relation between knowledge and power, and epistemological interrogations of truth and method, while Deleuze's philosophy of immanence stimulated Dabashi to provocatively suggest an 'un-naming' of religion.

  Situated at the interstices of philosophy, sociology of knowledge, literary and film criticism, Dabashi's oeuvre resonates with the panel themes of intertextuality, value and valuation, and the subversion of dominant discourses by speaking truth to power. Dabashi moves toward a worldview that is not only postcolonial and postmodern, but also post-orientalist and post-western, in which the binary of Islam vs the West has collapsed. Instead, Dabashi proposes what he calls an alternative

'liberation geography,' replacing not only the hegemonic pretensions of modernity and totalitarian Islamist ideologies, but also the dominant discourse of postmodernity, which he accuses of retaining a Eurocentric bias, as articulated in his joint polemical response with Walter Mignolo to Slavoj Žižek, published in *Can Non-Europeans Think?* (2015).

MT Makobe:	Genre's Depiction of Political Truth in a Postcolonial Translated Fiction in South Africa: Examinig A Story from the "We Are Growing" Children's Reader Series.

Throughout the world, fiction been associated with fantasy and speculative imagination, unreliable and – in the end – untrue. As one of the most important genres of literature, it enjoys the widest readership across all cultures in the 21st century. Counter-intuitively, perhaps, it has also become a most useful instrument for telling the truth, especially in difficult contexts, by providing a salient, truthful voice to the voiceless.

Marianna Brandt's contribution to a South African children's reader Series, *We Are Growing*, has captured the essence of "Political Truth" in Postcolonial South Africa. Her contribution, entitled *Dusty and Daisy*, has been translated into all ten South African Indigenous languages, including Afrikaans. This translated Reader, published by Oxford University Press during the year 2011, well-reflects the place of truth in fiction through the ways it relates to questions of equality, identity, and forced removals, as well as wider themes pertaining to environmental justice, mutual survival and sustenance, and those ultimate matters of truth and love.

This paper explores the emergence of truth through specific developments in Postcolonial South Africa literary genres, in this instance by using the translated Version of *Northern Sotho* language as one of the targeted languages from the source English language. The paper further considers how this fiction, translated into one of South Africa's African Languages implicitly mirrors elements within the question of rights in the present day South African situation. It considers how these ficitonal features might effect its readers – across the South African languages – and prepare them to be global readers and as such, global social thinkers.

The paper concludes by highlighting how literature can reflect and transmit truths in various ways, through its very form. It asks how genre can itself contribute to liberating the minds of citizens, by expanding understandings of social truths and thereby serving as weapons for freedom where there is none, a shield to protect free speech where there is none, and a bridge that brings citizens closer to truth and the universe.

Fiona Darroch:	Writing a Story of Haiti: Edwidge Danticat salvaging history and 'creating dangerously'

In her collection of critical essays 'Create Dangerously', Haitian born writer Edwidge Danticat unsettles the boundaries of fiction and history. She provocatively challenges our myths of 'truth' by guiding her readers through stories born out of Haiti's long history of political unrest and natural disaster. She is a daring storyteller and historian, one who takes seriously the urgent need to write her country's 'true' story, knowing the risk of writing as well as the risk entailed for some of those daring to read. What is particularly interesting is Danticat's recurring reference to (predominantly) Christian and voodoo myths and narratives to explore the boundaries between fiction and history (or ethnography). In the opening pages of her introduction she writes: "All artists, writers among them, have several stories – one might call them creation myths – that haunt and obsess them" (Danticat, Create Dangerously, 2010: 5). In this paper I will combine a reading of Danticat's fictional writings and critical commentaries to engage with the way in which postcolonial narratives dare to speak the 'truth'.

RELIGIOUS & INTER-RELIGIOUS STUDIES

Friday (28 Sept) 4:30-6:30 PM: Religious & inter-religious panel – session I

Mark Godin: Lessons in Make-Belief Translation from *The Lord of the Rings*: A
Theological Reflection on a 'Fiction of Authenticity'

At the end of *The Lord of the Rings*, in the last section of the last appendix, J. R. R. Tolkien describes the entire work as a translation into English from the actual language of the supposed ancient manuscript in which the tale is found. The scholarly invention of this imagined translation in itself becomes part of Tolkien's imagined world and its history, adding yet another layer of verisimilitude to the fantasy. This heightens the distance of the text in time, making the story stranger and sharpening the sense of lost antiquity.

But while this invented translation creates a bridge between real language and imagined speech it also distances the reader from the story. This "fiction of authenticity", coming at the end of the book, suddenly tells the reader that they have not quite read what they thought they have read: even their beloved hobbits do not carry the names to which they as readers have become attached over the long saga. Unsettling the reader thus can generate questions about the straightforwardness of the narrative.

This paper will investigate the way that this conceit of translation holds in tension both the deepening of the verisimilitude of Tolkien's world and the destabilizing of the relationship of reader to the text, arguing that this tension plays a significant role in enabling the work to be true to the art of make-believe. The paper will also point to how the "fiction of authenticity" offers an opportunity to interrogate theological uses of translation as a metaphor, exploring how this theological artistry engages in religious world-building. This will focus on two instances: translation as a model for inter-religious dialogue, and the notion that theologians and clergy have the task of translating doctrine into ordinary language.

Oliver Startin: The Theology of *Childhood's End*: A Symbolic Approach to Religious
and Secular Culture

In popular contemporary western discourse between religious and non-religious parties it is often implied by both sides that secular (that is to say 'non-religious') and religious culture are fundamentally opposed to one another. This is because the discussion is so often framed within the context of religion considered purely as a system of competing truth-claims, as Richard Dawkins exemplifies when he says, "Religion is about turning untested belief into unshakable truth" (*The Root of All Evil?*, 2006). My intention in this paper, therefore, is to outline an alternative framework which would draw upon the cultural anthropology of Clifford Geertz and Sherry Ortner in order to understand religious and secular cultures not as systems of beliefs, but as systems of symbols which both represent and shape lived experience of the world.

I will then use this framework to analyse a test case, looking at symbolism within a single secular literary work - Arthur C Clarke's novel *Childhood's End* - and comparing it with symbolism found in contemporary Christianity. *Childhood's End*, like much science fiction, comes from a secular context, but is fundamentally interested in the same questions as religion. Through a concise analysis of *Childhood's End*, and a subsequent comparison with Christian symbolism, I will show that it reflects, perhaps sometimes unconsciously, similar ideas and tensions to those found in Christianity: a connection between flesh and sin; doubt over the desirability of a world created without evil; and a latent fear of loss of individuality in a possible afterlife. I will suggest that this shows that, by approaching religion and culture as systems of symbols rather than beliefs, it becomes clear that there is more in common between western Christian and non-religious culture than is often suggested in popular rhetoric.

My conclusion, therefore, will be twofold. Firstly, I will propose that a symbol-based framework could be the key to promoting more constructive popular religious discourse, avoiding the

common stumbling block of 'contradictory belief'. Secondly, when using this framework, it becomes apparent that western secular culture might more accurately be termed a kind of 'demythologised Christianity', such is the extent to which the two share a common symbolic language, and this idea would merit further examination in future studies.

Sunday (30 Sept) 11:00-12:30 AM: Religious & inter-religious panel – session II

Meg MacDonald: Absolutely No Smiting: Developing a Theology of Religions in Terry Pratchett's Small Gods

This paper argues that Pratchett's *Small Gods (1992)* explores concepts of religious tolerance and pluralism as evolutions in theology of religions from a previous stance of monotheistic zelotary. I argue that this is an idea Pratchett first develops in *Pyramids* (1989), however *Small Gods* also affords his continued engagement with the consequences of the changed religion in later novels including- *Feet of Clay (1996), Hogfather (1996), Jingo (1997),Carpe Jugulum (1998),The Fifth Elephant (1999), Thud! (2005).*

   Small Gods focuses the exploration of the Omnian church and empire through the eyes of its lowliest novice, Brutha, and its god incarnate, Om, incarnate as a tortoise. Due to Om's incarnated experience as vulnerable, overlooked and with limited power, and his continued dialogue with Brutha, whose simple and fierce belief had caused him never to question the church until he met his god, the closed system of the Omnian religion is opened into a space of religious dialogue, philosophical growth, and pluralistic tolerance.

   I will undertake a close reading on the 'redevelopment' of the church of Om and the refocusing of 'religious truth' and what it means to 'live' or gain salvation from such truth. I will chart the change of the Omnian Religion alongside Laurel Scheider's *Beyond Monotheism* in order to illustrate how the initially closed system based on a monotheistic theocracy is interrogated and expanded through the incarnation of the god Om and belief offered by his prophet Brutha, and how human/divine interaction shape a new pathway to salvation, religious pluralism, tolerance, and inclusivism.

James H. Thrall: Modern Mythology and the Tricky Gods of Neil Gaiman

Neil Gaiman's wide-ranging production of novels, short stories, graphic novels, plays, films, television series, and children's books regularly mingles representations of gods with other forms of the fantastic. He returns often to the pantheon of Norse gods (e.g., *American Gods*), even offering his own retelling of the Norse myths (*Norse Mythology*). He also features such other deities as the West African/Caribbean god Anansi (*Anansi Boys*). The prevalence of not just such trickster gods as Anansi or the Norse Loki, but of the more general theme of trickery among the gods Gaiman finds so fascinating, provide him narrative grist. They also generate opportunities to explore questions of both theodicy (broadly understood) and epistemology. In producing his own form of modern mythology, infused with the preoccupations of more traditional models, Gaiman invites readers/viewers to consider the nature of knowledge, the possibility of truth, and the existential significance of evil. This paper will take a mythological studies approach to examine the mirror Gaiman lifts up to contemporary society as he draws attention to the ways competing sources of more or less trustworthy knowledge shape social values and expectations. In an era of political lies, alternative "truths," and general uncertainty, Gaiman offers one age-old and possibly reassuring response—"It's just the gods messing with us!" He goes further, however, in illuminating individual responsibility for constructing a social landscape in which what is believed and why have moral significance. This paper will focus primarily on *Anansi Boys* and *American Gods* (with reference to its recent television rendition), while drawing on other of Gaiman's works as appropriate. I hope to do my own updating of traditional approaches to mythological studies by putting such scholars as Mircea Eliade, Joseph Campbell, Northrop Frye, and Roland Barthes, in conversation with such contemporary scholars as Sophia Heller and Devdutt Pattanaik.

Zhange Ni: Truer than Truth: Retrieving the Forgotten History of "False" Religions in Neil Gaiman's *American Gods*

The interesting fact about Neil Gaiman's *American Gods* is that although the central theme of the novel appears to the conflict between the old gods (deities brought to America by generations of immigrants from all over the world) and the new gods (modern technologies controlling people's lives and receiving their devotion in return), the God of monotheist traditions is missing. The renowned Egyptologist Jan Assmann defined monotheism as not so much the exclusive worship of one god as the rejection of the false and the establishment of the true. In this light, the absence of the monotheistic God indicates the novel's departure from the model of religion as a set of truth claims. It is also worth noticing that the novel consists of two intertwining story arcs: the road trips taken by Shadow the protagonist who is caught up in the battle between the old and new gods, and a whole series of vignettes narrated by Ibis, the Egyptian god of writing and wisdom, about immigrants and their deities. Ibis' claim that his stories are "truer than truth" raises questions regarding the interplay of fiction and reality, truth and falsity, memory and forgetting, the established and the repressed. These questions further push us to reconsider the history of religions as one of monotheist-pagan interactions and secular-religious entanglements. Bypassing the truth-claiming monotheism, the novel draws resources from pagan traditions to engage issues brought about by secular cults such as nationalism, capitalism, and the enchantment of technology. The novel presents the similarities rather than the rigid divide between the pagan and secular sides and helps us to retheorize religion as an art/technique that, wielding the "truer than truth" power of imagination, regulates everyday practices and social relations and resists the "monotheistic" power to establish and maintain the status quo.

VISUAL ART

Friday (28 Sept) 2:45-4:15 PM: Visual Arts panel – session I

Panel by the research group
*Visionary Artists, Visionary
Objects (1800-now):*   Depicting Visionary Truths

Throughout modernity, the truthfulness of institutional religious claims has been increasingly doubted and questioned, while artists began to offer transformed and new metaphysical claims through their works of art. The papers in this panel explore the conceptual relevance of the visionary, to shed light on visual art's functioning against the backdrop of the dramatically transforming socio-cultural position of institutionalized religions.

Lieke Wijnia: Finding Truth in Visionary Art

The introduction to this panel sets out a short overview of the concept of the visionary in art. Tying together utopian thinking and spiritual practices, this concept draws attention to metaphysical questions and concerns. Negotiating between the imagination and alternative realities, one of the major challenges is how to understand the position of truth in visionary artistic practices. Do artists create works to provide a sense of truthfulness to their visions? Or, vice versa, do visionary claims make artworks more true? Furthermore, the use of the visionary as an academic concept allows scholars to incorporate not only the artist's intentions and practices, but also how the art is perceived by a wider audience. The afterlife of the artwork seems to play a crucial role in understanding art's visionary—and to a certain extent truthful—characteristics.

Michelle Foot: Painting the 'Vision Splendid': Depicting the Truths of Modern Spiritualism

In the early twentieth century, Scottish artist Alfred Edward Borthwick (1871-1955) established his career painting the union of matter and spirit. Using a formulaic motif in his work, the artist repeatedly depicted the subject of mortals accompanied by spirit entities in order to convey the truth of Spiritualism: that human personality survives bodily death and the spirits continue to maintain a presence in the mortal realm. The matter-and-spirit trope signified the belief that spirits were engaged in communication with mortals. Borthwick often worked within a Christian-Spiritualist vein, whereby Christ characterized the ultimate individual spirit to communicate with spirit-mediums.

This paper will examine Borthwick's work in terms of how his paintings proclaimed the truth of Spiritualism and therefore appealed to Spiritualists. It will recognize how the materiality of the artwork was second to the spiritual conception of the idea it represented. Borthwick's work was interpreted by his Spiritualist viewers as being inspired by clairvoyance. His paintings were perceived as the 'vision splendid'; being both beautiful and spiritual in their quality they were seen as didactic of the central tenet of Spiritualism. By drawing on letters authored by a Spiritualist and sent to the artist in the 1930s, and reviews of his work in national newspapers, it is possible to gauge the response to Borthwick's artistic vision. This will reveal to what extent Spiritualists wished to claim the artworks as artefacts of truth.

Michelle Fletcher: The Writing's on the Wall: *Belshazzar's Feast* and the Anxiety of Inscribing Visionary Truths

Daniel 5 is a Biblical text about writing, and the anxiety it evokes. When a hand appears that inscribes a cryptic message on the wall before King Belshazzar and his guests, what it is transmitting is far from clear, and the king is terrified. The focus of this paper is how artists have engaged with this visionary act of writing, and how this in turn complicates conceptions of the written word as the locus of truth. To do this, I will focus on two Daniel-dialoguing visualizations that ascribe particular importance to the medium of writing within the scene: Rembrandt's *Belshazzar's Feast*, and Susan Hiller's *Belshazzar's Feast, the Writing on Your Wall*. I will explore how these visualizations of Daniel 5 have chosen not to cut ties with textual trappings, but to re-inscribe the medium into their work. Particular attention will be given to Rembrandt's arrangement of the Aramaic inscription, which exhibits a concern with veracity in a way rare among visual portrayals of Daniel 5, and to Hiller's practice of the 'paraconceptual' with its focus on exploring the 'distinction between literally reading and understanding signs or marks and interpreting them'. Through Rembrandt's luminous letters and Hiller's video, vision transcriptions, empirical recollections, automatic writing, and news reports, this paper will encounter notions such as version control, the fragility of translation, the numinous characteristics of inscriptions, memory and misrepresentation, and free association interpretation. This leads back to the anxiety evoked by the writing in Daniel 5, which demonstrates how when Daniel states 'This is the interpretation of the matter', its visionary truth is precariously insubstantial.

Naomi Billingsley: Complexities of Visionary Artistic Practices

As co-convener of the international research network Visionary Artists, Visionary Objects (1800-now), Naomi Billingsley will respond to the three paper presentations. In her response, she will address overall findings and challenges that are of relevance in the study of the visionary in artistic practices. She will then open the floor for discussion of all of the papers in this session.

Friday (28 Sept) 4:30-6:30 PM: Visual Arts panel – session II

Rumi Ito: Enku's Truth: The Art of a Japanese Buddhist Monk

In this presentation, the Japanese Buddhist monk Enku (1632 – 1695) (円空: en – kuu) is introduced and his artwork is discussed in the context of truth. He was born in modern-day Gifu prefecture and

became a monk after completing his religious training. In his later years, he traveled through Japan and produced more than 5,000 Buddhist carvings. *Ryomen Sukuna*, one of these figures, appears in a story in *Chronicles of Japan* (*Nihon Shoki* 日本書紀) as a demonic figure with two faces, four hands, and four feet. As an exhibition catalogue notes, "The sculpture by Enku, with its two faces visible side by side and holding an axe in its lap, differs considerably from the image described in the *Nihon Shoki*." Why did Enku's carving differ from the story? Is Enku's Ryomen Shukuna not accurate? What is the truth? Truth in Enku's mind seems to have been prayer for those local people who suffered from poverty and governmental abuse. Enku is believed to have been a warm-hearted priest, who prayed for those who suffered, including prayer for those secret Christians who were persecuted under the anti-Christian purges of those days. In this presentation, Enku's works will be presented and discussed in light of questions of veracity and intent.

Deborah Lewer: Dadü Dada: Ersatz 'Truth', Revelation and Prophecy in Berlin Dada 1918-20

This paper explores negotiations by the Dada movement after the First World War of 'truth'. The Dadaists in Berlin articulated a radical critique of contemporary culture through performance, in manifestoes, in actions, pamphlets, poetry, montages, drawings, assemblages, dance, press releases, fakes and hoaxes, in an almanac and – once – as an exhibition of 'Dada products'. Parodic, prophetic, crypto-religious, ludic and 'deadly earnest', Dada repeatedly enacted a theologically-inflected critique of the limits of knowledge and the contingency of truth. This was played out, more than anywhere else, in arguably its most incisive medium: that of the journal. Willfully disruptive to habitualised reading, the Dada journals were media for avantgardist exploration of the possibilities for visual communication. They express Dada's self-appointed role as 'executioner of the bourgeois soul', mediate fluid pseudonymous identities and lampoon in word and image the 'Expressionism of the German patriot' (Raoul Hausmann). These slim pamphlets – *Der Dada* and others – were thus vital for Dada's cultural politics and aesthetic practices – of montage, (dis)assemblage, rupture, juxtaposition, alibi, inversion and transgression.

My focus here is on the recourse the Dadaists made to the visual and textual languages of prophecy, apocalypse and revelation (and Revelation) as a means for breaking the seals of those other 'truths': of advertising, political propaganda, journalism, commerce and, indeed, of the Church. This, I argue, was most incisive in terms of its avant-garde staging of radical, alternative 'truths' in a context of epistemological bankruptcy. Among its means were the figure of the Fool, apocalyptically ruptured time, carnivalesque inversion and a critical aesthetics of *ersatz* materials and relations. In discussing Dada's provocative, uncomfortable propositions for *ersatz* notions of God, time, money, food and life itself, this paper will seek to open up questions of the potential (or impotence) of art in an age of increasingly tenuous 'truth'.

Michel Tombroff: Kronecker, Einstein, and the Cross

Two eminent scientists, the German mathematician Leopold Kronecker, and the German-born theoretical physicist Albert Einstein, made comments in which they refer to God in their respective rebuttals of the theory of transcendental and transfinite numbers and of the consequences of quantum theory. The apparent contradiction between the objective activity of science and the subjective experience of faith has been the subject of numerous commentaries over the centuries by scientists and philosophers, and a source of inspiration to many artists. In this paper, I present a brief review of this science vs. God dichotomy, starting with Voltaire's "God the watchmaker". I then describe my two recent artworks, *The Necessity of Chance* and *The Work of Man*, inspired by Kronecker's and Einstein's statements. Finally, I explain why I, an atheist, chose the Christian cross as symbol for these artworks.

THEOLOGICAL HUMANISM

Friday (28 Sept) 2:45-4:15 PM: Theological Humanism panel – session I:
Truth and consequences

Amber Griffioen: Beyond Truth and Falsehood: A Theological Humanism for the 21st Century?

The challenges posed to Philosophy of Religion from the New Atheists, on the one hand, and from Postmetaphysical Theology, on the other, threaten to undermine POR's relevance in the contemporary academic and political landscape. In this paper, I argue that both POR and its challengers need to move beyond the realism-antirealism debate and develop a new epistemological approach - one focused less on the epistemic goals of mind-independent truth and objective correctness and more on the equally important pursuit of mutual understanding and intersubjective resonance. I claim that such an approach need not jettison talk of truth, but it does need to re-orient itself with respect to its truth claims, especially in light of the ways certain kinds of truth-discourse may function to actually undermine productive discussion and debate in the public sphere. I will conclude with a suggestion for how a theological humanism (or a humanist theology) oriented in the ways I suggest might provide new avenues for research in POR and new opportunities for dialogue between science and religion.

Verna Marina Ehret: Performative Narrative, Communal Truth, and Gun Control

Communal life is a continually unraveling series of intermingled stories. Narrative is not just an epistemology, it is also embedded in the being of being human. The truth of communities unfolds in the intermingled narratives of its members through an underlying story of social contract. The social contract lays a kind of foundation, but the truth of that social contract is as fluid as the people who make up the community it forms. Diversity of perspectives gives life to a society by keeping truth nimble and able to adapt to the ever-changing conditions of the community. It is the little truths, the individual elements of societal narratives, where questions of evidence based truth become most important, because these are the places where human flourishing is at stake.

In this essay I will explore communal truth as a fluid frame of performative narrative, where community emerges in the creative activity of truth making through the current discussions about the 2nd Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The goal is to use the re-framing of the discussion through transcontextual narrative to create shared space that invites truth to unfold in debate. In the narrative of the larger community there are truths that are felt, for example the idea of God, and truths that are based in experience that lead to claims based on evidence. Those narratives that are true in that someone accepts them as true and are not true in that the evidence suggests otherwise, become performative narratives of estrangement, dividing the community and weakening the social contract. Transcontextual narratives become performative of reconciliation and community building when they frame evidentiary truths that get at the heart of what concerns people most. In the reshaping of narratives rather than simply forcing evidence, communal truth and social contract can unfold to encourage the flourishing of all.

Joyce Rondaij: The Ambiguous Truth: The Grey Zone Between Good and Evil

Primo Levi dedicated his life to the testimony of the truth of Auschwitz. The 'grey zone' is probably one of Levi's most well-known and innovative concepts to get grasp of the complex interpersonal dynamics in the camp. It indicates the ambiguous space between victim and perpetrator, where 'good' and 'evil' appear less easily distinguishable than wished for. This zone does not expel the perpetrator from guilt though; it is the oppressor who has prepared and activated the process of collaboration. Levi coined the 'grey zone' in the book The Drowned and the Saved (1986), in which he responds to the climate of the eighties. Especially the post-war generation shocks him with their stereotypes and indifference to the collaboration in the camp shows how political compulsion gives birth to the indefinite area of ambiguity and compromise, which confounds the tendency towards simplification and judgement. According to Levi, the exploration of the grey zone is pivotal to understand the human

species and defend ourselves when new tests face us. In this paper I will introduce the ambiguous truth of the grey zone and link it to Richard Kearney's book Strangers, Gods and Monsters, in which he addresses the black-and-white scenarios of contemporary war rhetoric. Kearney argues that the imprisonment in binary positions prevents us from understanding ourselves-as-another: it is necessary to trace the interconnections between the poles of sameness and strangeness.

Saturday (29 Sept) 1:30-3:00 PM: Theological Humanism panel – session II: Truth and Embodiment

Brad Onishi: Re-Humanizing: Philosophy, Religion, and the Truth of Non-Fiction

Various theoretical domains are in the midst of an "affective turn" that is reorienting theory from the discursive to the bodily. Among other things, the "affective turn" threatens core components of phenomenology and poststructuralism by suggesting that there are pre- and non-discursive elements that escape the purview of the supposed universal structures and horizons of lived-experience. More specifically, it threatens phenomenologies of religion that attempt to reach "truth," including the truth of revelation (Marion), the Eucharist (Lacoste), and the flesh (Falque), through ever-more refined phenomenological reductions. From the view of affect theory, phenomenology is little more than an incomplete, and thus inauthentic, representation of the body (and thus of its truth).

The "affective turn" has coincided with the memoir revolution. Over the last twenty-five years, memoir, often denigrated by fiction and nonfiction writers alike, has become recognized as both a serious literary genre and perhaps the most effective vehicle for conveying bodily truth.

In this paper, I explore the limits of phenomenology by juxtaposing it with a form of memoir writing that has come to be known as the braided-essay: a piece in which an author weaves together two or three threads in order to provide a more expansive, de-centered nonfiction account. The goal is to provide a richer nonfiction account than is possible in linear storytelling or mere reporting. Nicole Walker envisions the braided essay as "a chalkboard onto which we scrape our ontological questions," so as to shape and reshape our conceptions of self and world. Taking cues from braided essayists, my argument is that there is an essential difference in the bodily truths of the first-person account and the supposed universal structures of phenomenology, and recognizing these differences may demand radical new theological and humanistic visions and methodologies.

Daniel Boscaljon: Sex and Undeception

This paper is an attempt to put the process of love and love making in slow motion, to pause and see its stages in new and unfamiliar ways, to find the moments—as Muybridge showed with the running horse—where we are lifted at the very moment of being gathered. This paper is written from the perspective of a white cis-gendered man, deeply invested in liberation of marginalized and overlooked persons, inquiring about the way that new materialisms can combine with phenomenological approaches to embodiment and theological conceptions of love to produce a new understanding of how love, consciousness, and materiality coordinate to produce an enhanced form of community.

In it, I wish to expand on my previous work on love, which argues for the centrality of proximity, hospitality, and mutuality in the inward experience of love, and discuss how these components persist in carnal interactions. Touch, especially sexual touch, provides an alchemical transformation of one's understanding of the truth of self in relation to other. This mode of undeception (which acknowledges a theory of truth that accounts for the experience of revelation deprived of a context of certainty), I argue, is key to living well with others. Although there are many motivations and possibilities for sexual touch, my argument will focus on a normative kind of touch and interaction that opens and awakens an authentic mode of being-with another.

My conceptual backdrop for this paper arises out of conversations in literary theory that question the relationship of "identity" against a more general background when I either feel myself immersed in a transcendent "all feeling" or a numbed, depersonalized, inauthentic mode of existence. Contemporary theorists like Branca Arsic and Sharon Cameron, like Freud, believe that pain summons

us to self-awareness, or our awareness of the self as alone. I would like to argue that the passion of love can individuate us toward a limited, immanent, finite, corporeal space of the more-than-self. But, despite advances in technology, I want also to argue that the presence of touch in love is a necessary component to what it means to feel in love. The specific work of sexual touch—where one feels one's self feeling the other in a distinct form of caress—allows not only pleasure, but also serves as the creation of truth that largely conforms to Heidegger's discussion of truth in the "Origin of the Work of Art." I will pause in this section to recollect the need for preserving the identity of the self and other in order to create a specific kind of sharing with another that is a collaborative, mutual installing and founding of a truth within the finite frame of self and other, simultaneously.

I will conclude by discussing how the combination of sex and love allows lovers to experience a space of identity revealed in love, but one that can be developed as a foundation for other forms of social intimacy, building on recent texts on community by Nancy, Moten, and Agamben.

Sunday (30 Sept) 11:00-12:30 AM: Theoligigal Humanism panel – session III:
The Social Meaning of Truth

Iben Damgaard: Kierkegaard and the quest for truth in the motley variety of modern life

Kierkegaard praises Socrates for asking about truth subjectively as an existing individual concerned with what it means to live truthfully. He praises the "Socratic art of questioning" because it begins not abstractly and objectively in the center, but in the periphery, in the motley variety of life. Kierkegaard embraces what he calls the Socratic, humanistic wisdom that "subjectivity is truth", with the addition that it is expressed more inwardly if the sentence begins: "subjectivity is untruth"! He thereby articulates a wound of negativity, an awareness of a puzzling, unsettling strangeness within a human being, who is never fully transparent to and true to oneself and others. Kierkegaard addresses this problem with the Christian notion of consciousness of sin, but adds that already Socrates recognized it, when Socrates in Phaudrus admits that he is still not quite clear about himself, whether he is really a more curious monster than Typhon, the dragon with hundred heads, or a simple, gentle being sharing something with the divine. With this reference to Socrates, eulogized throughout history for his quest to know himself, Kierkegaard accentuates a shared human existential-ethical-religious bewilderment about who we really are and how we are true to what matters most.

The paper will show that this otherness and uncertainty at stake in asking existentially about truth is addressed indirectly by how Kierkegaard writes philosophy: In Kierkegaard's dialogical and polyphonic writings, philosophical thinking is always already engaged with its other, it is not beginning systematically in the center, and it is not sovereign, transparent pure philosophy. It takes place as a philosophical quest in narratives, aphorism and poetic images in the periphery and strange side streets in the motley variety of modern life.

Ida Simonsson: The Value of Truth

My PhD project explores the logic of value in some contemporary texts that examine the intersection of economics and theology. Economic value, it turns out in my readings, is inherently linked to truth. One of the texts I study is Philip Goodchild's Theology of Money. In it, the following line of reasoning can be found. In democracy, the ruler and the ruled are identified, the ruler representing the collective will. For this will to be public, it must be represented. For representation of the public will to be conceptually possible, it must have an object. It must will something. However, one of the fundamentals of liberal democracy is to refrain from imposing an objective common good. The public arena is the space for airing diverse and contradictory opinions. In this free space, then, there is competition for attention – truth is not necessarily heard better than mere opinion. In order to gain momentum an expressed opinion must appeal to the interests of the majority, something which wealth alone can do. "The inevitable outcome of a liberal democracy, lacking a collective determination of higher goods, is subjection to consumer desire".1 'Post-truth' came after Theology of Money, but the latter's somber wording is reminiscent of this epithet. The argument referred is also interesting in

relation to how Theology of Money understands its own predicament. The text explicitly states that the only authority accompanying the concepts and evaluations it advances "will be the credit they attract by means of the potential they offer".2 In other words, no matter how true its concepts might be, they have no authority of their own. Theology of Money must appeal to its listeners, it must be credited. Its authority is granted by readers' evaluations. It is subjected to consumer desire. In my paper, I will explore this problematic of the value of truth through reading Theology of Money against itself in the manner I have done above. What can such a reading teach us of the conditions of possibility for critical thought in post-truth society?

MUSIC AND TRUTH

Friday (28 Sept) 1:00–2:30 PM Music and Truth panel – session I: Religion

Hyun-Ah Kim: The Anglican Perspective on Appropriateness and Authenticity in Church Music

Throughout the history of Christian music there have been controversies on 'true' church music. The question of authenticity in church music lies at the heart of musical polemics during the English Reformation. Both the humanist educators and reformers redefined music and its roles in civil and religious life, drawing upon the classical and Christian notions of music and musicians. Although their criteria for true church music are not always clear-cut, they nonetheless suggest what music and musicians are appropriate or not for the church from various perspectives. The search for true church music resurged in nineteenth-century Anglican churches, which led to the revival of 'old' church music, including musical compositions of the English Reformation and those written under the impact of the Council of Trent.

     This paper aims to elucidate the Anglican notions of true church music, by demonstrating that the Anglican discourse on authenticity in church music is centred on what is appropriate (*quid deceat*) is for the church. What are the connections between the appropriateness of music/musicians and authenticity in church music? What are the considerations and justifications of music as appropriate for true church music? The paper explores the underlying ethical and theological ideas of early Anglican speculations on true church music and the extent to which these ideas influenced later notions of *authentic* church music, developed within the Church of England.

Yusuf Ziya Öğretici: Banned While Spread: Between Prohibition and Permission, Music in Islamic Thought

One can easily argue that music is forbidden in Islam. Yet, it is very spread throughout Muslim communities. Even if that case is worth to be discussed, prohibition-permission pendulum is just a side of the issue, namely a problem of fiqh (a branch of Islamic sciences), the main aim of which is to specify one's rights and responsibilities in terms of Islam. However, the statue of music in Islamic thought should be evaluated with different points or view such as theoretically with philosophy in el-Kindi, al-Farabi, and Ibn Sina and practically with Sufism in Mawlawism. In this paper, I will firstly touch the debates among Muslims concerning music whether it is prohibited or permitted. After that, different accounts for music in Islamic history in philosophy and Sufism will be interpreted by reading certain thinkers. Finally, I will conclude my argument how cross-national Islamic thoughts are melted down into what is called recently as 'Turkish music'. The purpose of this paper is to provide a layout firstly for the grounds that how it is possible to study music in Islamic thought, and (2) secondly, for the future researches, to apprehend how Muslims could have able to reach the complex concepts, like makam, in music.

Svein Aage Christoffersen: Faith and musical pleasure in Luther's Theology of the Cross

Martin Luther seems to have treated beauty and sensuous pleasure in two very different ways. In his younger days beauty is treated dialectically, with reference to the cross as a turning point for all human wisdom and understanding. In his Dictata super Psalterium (1513-15) Luther says that whoever is most beautiful in the sight of God is the ugliest, and, vice versa, whoever is the ugliest is the most beautiful. In the Heidelberg Disputation (1518) Luther states that sinners are beautiful because they are loved and not loved because they are beautiful. However, the late Luther in his Encomion musices (1538) praises music for the way it in a straightforward manner delights and pleases the human heart. Music is a gift of God, and it is no dialectic between this gift and the sensuous experience of it. Hence, Luther may have changed his mind about beauty, or beauty may mean different things to the young and the old Luther. Either way, Luther's theology of the cross seems to have no bearing at all on his theory of music. Or is there a connection after all?

Saturday (29 Sept) 3:20–4:50 PM Music and Truth panel – session II: Composers

Andrew Kesiak   In search of truth: John Tavener's transition from Western Culture to Eastern Tradition

John Tavener, an English composer, considered by many commentators as a representative of the so-called 'holy minimalism', owes – to a large extent - his unique musical personality to Russian Orthodox Church. In his work, the clash of two great traditions, Western Christianity and Eastern Orthodox generated unique music whose aesthetics are deeply rooted in Tradition and exceeds that Tradition in a very specific way. Tavener's sacred work is not simply an eclectic combination of some esoteric forms of expressions. His intention 'to produce music that was the sound of God' could only be achieved by transforming his apprehension of the Western Culture, by abandoning Western paradigms, by destructing his own tradition and eventually, by creating his new milieu, his philosophical, intellectual, musical and religious home.
       In this paper I will assess the process of destruction and creation, faith and doubt, thus an intellectual and spiritual journey of a composer who from Presbyterianism through Roman Catholicism found the real meaning of his life in Eastern Orthodoxy and whose tumultuous and modernist work in the 60s radically changed into 'true sacred music' - a whole series of works of celestial simplicity in the late 70s onwards. I will try to answer a question of what meaning a deeply traditional music and spirituality could have for contemporary culture, especially in a context of classical music. I will recall some of Tavener's personal statements, his remarks (at times very critical) about commonly recognized cultural figures and will analyze some of his most significant works.

Jonas Lundblad   Birdsong as the "true face of Nature" – Messiaen´s new paradigm of musical truth"

In a comment on his experimental 1951 *Livre d'Orgue*, Messiaen suggested that the presence of twelve-tone technique in the work constituted "a small sacrifice to the idols of the 20th century". In relation to the 1959 *Catalogue d'oiseaux*, he suggested that a turn towards birdsong was a refuge in times of artistic crises. In free, joyous and unlaboured birdsong, the "true face of Nature" was revealed.
       Between these statements Messiaen experimented with aesthetic and technical ways to integrate birdsong into his own musical language. Fascinating enough, this aspiration did require a heightened theoretical complexity. While his turn towards nature can be viewed as an aspiration to find a contrary artistic path from contemporary conceptions of musical truth arising from Schönberg, dodecaphony is consistently employed in Messiaen´s musical representation of natural objects other than the birds.

This paper delineates musical aspects of the "true face of Nature", with clear inspiration from Deleuze´s and Guattari´s discussion of Messiaen – but built on close musical analysis of movements from the *Livre* and the *Catalogue*. Partly in dialogue with previous research, the thesis is that Messiaen uses dodecaphony to depict lesser "spiritual" realms within nature. While Messiaen´s avian world has often been recognized as angelic – a co-occurrence between heaven and earth – the paper gives examples to show how the truth in birdsong symbolises an artistic freedom above limitations in the paradigm of truth associated with twelve-tone modernism.

Darren J.N. Middleton: True Rastalogy in Tarrus Riley's *Love Created I*

From Belize's palm-covered tropical paradise of Caulker Cay to the appreciative crowds at Japan's Yokohama Reggae Festival, from the Shashemene settlement in Ethiopia to the youth subcultures of various post-Soviet states, the Rastafari religious movement is on the world's cultural map. Reggae music explains such internationalization. Since the late 1960s, artists like Bob Marley and Queen Ifrica have been using music to transmit as well as explain Rastafari's message of black somebodiness—an anticolonial theo-psychology that sponsors a reclamation of self and cultural agency denied by late modern capitalism, "Babylon" in the language of the Rastafari.

This paper investigates the role played by Tarrus Riley, contemporary American-Caribbean singer-songwriter, in the articulation of Rastafari religion, culture, and politics in Jamaica and other parts of the African diaspora. After sketching Riley's biography, placing him within the context of reggae's post-Marley possibilities, I focus on "Love Created I," a song that appears on VP Records' 2008 reissue of Riley's 2004 album, *Challenges*. With its own intertextual plays, addressing everything from Augustinian theological anthropology to a 14th century Ethiopian legend cycle and from Robert Powell's blue-eyed Jesus to Marley's "Jah Live" single, Riley's song upholds the criticality of His Imperial Majesty Haile Selassie I, the chanting down of the Babylonian condition of the Christian West, and the significance of InI consciousness for realizing true Rasta identity. Through historical-religious-lyrical analysis, I address how Riley's "Love Created I" both chronicles and explains salient features of modern-day "Rastalogy."

MATERIAL RELIGION

Saturday (29 Sept) 1:30-3:00 PM Material Religion panel – session I

David Krueger: The Sacralization of the Kensington Rune Stone: Constructing a Myth
                                   of America's Birth

In 1898, a recent immigrant to the U.S. from Sweden unearthed a slab of stone with a runic inscription from a Minnesota farm field. It told the story of a group of visitors from Scandinavia who had visited the region in 1362, centuries prior to the European settlement of the American Midwest. Scholars of Norse languages quickly denounced the inscription as a fraud, likely the creation of the immigrant farmer seeking to prove his ancestors had claimed the land prior to his arrival. The stone inscription would have been forgotten if it were not for the intervention of a Norwegian American author named Hjalmar Holand, who acquired the stone in 1907 and began a decades-long crusade to prove the date in the inscription was authentic. Even though scholars would continue to reject the stone, Holand embedded his pseudo-scientific claims about the artifact in an American myth of origin that gained wide circles of popular support including Scandinavian immigrants, Catholic bishops, and civic boosters. By the 1960s, nearly 60% of Minnesotans believed that Norsemen had visited their region during the late Medieval period. Holand's beguiling story of Christian Norsemen being the first to visit what is now the U.S. gave people a reason to challenge scholarly conclusions about the runic artifact. Over time, Holand collaborated with locals to construct mythic landscape that included the site of America's first Catholic mass and another site imagined to be the location of America's first Christian martyrs who were killed by Native Americans. This paper will exemplify the process by

which the objective assessment of an artifact's provenance can be overwhelmed by interpreters who deploy compelling narratives and sacred performance.

Hwasun Choe: Tears and Meditation in Exhibition: healing or cheating?

In this presentation, I will look at how two recent exhibitions in Seoul, Korea—the Mark Rothko exhibition (2015) and the Alberto Giacometti exhibition (2017–2018)—mystified the artists' lives and works, and how visitors were persuaded to experience these artists' works as representations of transcendental truth. Both exhibitions attracted a lot of people in Seoul and were especially welcomed by people who wanted to find religious significance in art. However, I think the concept of religion and religious experience that was used and applied to interpret and frame artworks in these exhibitions has to be reconsidered and also the way religious elements and ritual aspects were used in these exhibitions should be re-examined. Eventually, I am going to question the reality of this emotional sensation by which a connection between religion and the arts was made, and to discuss the problematic aspects of so-called 'religious experience' in the exhibition. If a religion that insists on only one truth is a fossilized form of religion that has lost the human imagination and eagerness of the moment when the religion first began, then a certain tendency of reducing arts into religion might eventually lead arts to such a fossilized form.

S. Brent Plate   Museum as Medium: The Public Understanding of Religion on Display

Among all the media and means through which a broad swath of the public comes to understand religious lives and traditions, museums have emerged as some of the most prominent social institutions influencing the popular conceptions and imaginaries of religion. From history to natural history, art to archaeology, local to national, museums actively shape how people come to know about beliefs and practices other than their own, just as they challenge conceptions of one's own cultural, religious, and national histories. In this presentation, I draw three general conclusions. First, museums are *like religion*, operating in and on the sensing body, creating spaces and experiences for audiences/practitioners. Second, museums become a vital space where *religious literacy* can occur. Third, through these processes, religion is "*museumified*," taking on new meanings through the mediating activities of exhibition, architecture, and display.

Sunday (30 Sept) 9:00-10:30 AM Material Religion panel – session II

Petra Carlsson Redell: Beyond the Phantasmagoria of the Everyday: Liubov Popova's Spiritual Materialism

Liubov Popova (1889-1924) was a leading figure in the Constructivist movement which was active approximately between 1913-1924. Popova was renowned, an undisputed artistic authority yet her work and thought have not been as scholarly scrutinized as that of her male colleagues nor discussed in relation to the branches of 20th century thought to which it has obvious connections. Her sex is one likely reason for the lack of scholarly attention, but another is the often-described incongruence of her contribution: On the one hand she was a political materialist artist yet on the other hand a spiritual artist inspired by the Russian icon tradition and the platonic spirituality of Suprematism and Rayism. The project of which this paper is a part, relates Popova to 20th century thinkers with the aim of entering her work precisely at the intersection of the materialistic and spiritual, viewing her complex account of the relation between the two as an expression not of inconsistency but of what could be named a spiritual materialism. In conversation with Walter Benjamin's notions of the commodity as phantasmagoria and the first versus second technology, the paper aims to throw light on Popova's notion of objects.

Jeff Keuss: Materialism in the Gospel of John after Slavoj Žižek

This paper will address the issue of subjective materialism exemplified through a critical reading of John 4: 5-30 through the lens of Slavoj Žižek. While my comments will be particular to John 4, I will be suggesting that a materialist view of the Johannine gospel provides an authenticating hermeneutic method for a deep reading of this vital text via what Žižek terms "the Parallex view." John's Gospel is reputed to represent a turn to the mystical in the early Christian community. This paper will counter that assertion by locating the key hermeneutic questions for John's Gospel not in an abstraction of the physical in favor of the spiritual, but a radical call toward encountering the multi-valiant aspects of the Real in particularity and imminence – what Žižek eludes to as the "the perverse core of christianity" which is the subtitle to his first extended reflection on Christianity in 2003 entitled *The Puppet and the Dwarf*. This 'perverse core' is the preservation of universality and surplus of meaning in the particularity of materialism – what post-marxist critique have termed 'dialectical materialism' - and when coupled with the person and ministry of Jesus Christ what I will term 'dynamic incarnationalism'.

Jason Fallin: Christmas Through Your Eyes: Material Culture and Moral Formation

Evangelical Christians articulate strong commitments to the text of the Bible. These textual commitments then become instantiated in the Evangelical community's material and visual culture. In this paper I argue that these aesthetic instantiations of Evangelical textual commitments provide important insights into Evangelical moral formation. Thus I argue that Evangelical aesthetic texts and dramatic practices provide a narrative that shapes the imaginations and dispositions of its participants through their gazes and bodies; imaginations and dispositions particular to and consistent with the aesthetic of those texts and practices. In order to accomplish that end, I will provide a cultural and ethical analysis of the domestic portion of the Christmas gift giving program Operation Christmas Child (OCC). For the purposes of this paper, I will frame the program in terms of its cultural texts (online videos, web pages and fiction) and the practices of its participants within the United States. I propose a formational line can be traced between sacred text, aesthetic text, practice and moral formation, employing OCC as a case study toward that end. The frame used to accomplish this analysis will draw on the scholarship of visual culture scholar David Morgan and philosopher Mark Johnson alongside the virtue ethics frameworks of Stanley Hauerwas and Alisdair MacIntyre. Thus, I will provide a theoretical account of the aesthetic and dramatic processes which buttress moral formation.

THE IMAGINARY TRUTH: Social Imaginaries between reality and fiction in a visual world

Saturday (29 Sept) 9:00-10:30 AM The Imaginary Truth panel

Thomas A. Carlson: Imagining Belief: The Invisible Truths of Sociality

Many of our most powerful social realities—such as God, money, and nation—never appear to us directly in themselves. Rather they become real, appear to us, and prove effective, thanks only to the constructive work of social relations through which, via testimony, we believe that others believe in them. To the extent that we believe that others believe, we are able to see or imagine realities that remain in themselves, strictly speaking, invisible. Drawing on a range of thinkers from Max Weber to Michel de Certeau, this paper will explore the ways in which contemporary media can both generate and undermine the invisible truths of sociality.

Martin Crowley: Imagining Civil War in the Contemporary French Novel

The contemporary French imaginary is haunted by the spectre of civil war. In a flurry of recent essays (by David Djaïz, Ivan Rioufol, Charles Rojzman, or Jacques Marseille) and novels (by Michel Houellebecq, Éric Pessan, Laurent Obertone, Jean Rolin, Charles Robinson, or Sabri Louatah), the image of civil war is repeatedly invoked as a way of articulating conflicting positions on the social and political challenges faced by the country. This paper will analyse these invocations, tracing how their different inflections of the civil war topos situate them in the contemporary socio-political field. Drawing on work by Rancière and Sloterdijk, it will also consider the role of literary culture (here in the forms of the essay and the novel) in this field, as part of the architecture of a civil society these authors present as under threat. It will accordingly seek to determine not only the interests served by the imagined spectre of civil war, but also the coherence or otherwise of announcing this cataclysm through forms of imaginary articulation it would relegate to historical redundancy.

Laurens ten Kate: The Play of the World: Social Imaginaries as Transcending Spaces –
                          From Taylor to Nietzsche

In this paper the theoretical framework of social imaginaries will be related to the philosophical debate on globalization. Ten Kate does so by analyzing the aspect of *space* and *play* in imaginaries. In the play of creating a temporary world through imagination a new perspective on transcendence comes to light. He carries out this analysis of imaginaries as spaces and worlds in a critical dialogue with Taylor, Nancy and Nietzsche.   Ten Kate starts from the argument that Taylor's account of imaginaries as sets of beliefs and values that bind a specific social group is not far-reaching enough. Imaginaries can bind people, but at the same time they can disrupt their alliances. Moreover, imaginaries should not be thought solely on a societal level, but also on an existential level. The disruptive force of social imaginaries comes light in the fact that they opn up a paradox: they produce a temporary loss of identity as well as new experiences of sense. This paradox illuminates the new 'conditions of belief' Taylor analyses in his *A Secular Age* (2007), but it is taken more seriously by Nancy in his theory of world-creation and in Nietzsche's concept of 'world-play', as evoked in his *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and in *The Gay Science*. The paper will be concluded by a brief interpretation of the first hymn of the *Zarathustra*.

ECOTHEOLOGIES

Friday (28 Sept) 2:45-4:15 PM Ecotheologies panel – session I

Mary Mills: Ecological Foundations in the Book of Psalms

The paper addresses the correlation between geography and vision in texts which align earth and social spaces with a cosmic perspective. The argument is that inly from outside of or from above, can we properly evaluate the nature of human society. In this context maps act as 'active, contributive elements in shaping social and spiritual practices'. The specific aim of the paper is to explore cosmographical iconography in selected Psalm texts in order to draw out ecological principles for wider application. The passages chosen offer commentary on inter-active, holistic energy flows between heavens and earth. While these texts can be read from the angle of humanity's own interests the paper turns this approach round to put the cosmos in prime position as the controlling order of human behaviour. A fertile earth requires a just society as part of its profile, reflective of the harmony between natural forces. The forces of nature include aspects of disjunctive power also and humanity needs to embrace both helpful and apparently negative impacts from nature. Linked to the discussion of these 'ecological truths' is a detailed examination of key icons such as the Tree of Life, mountain tops, the balance of wet and dry. Psalm texts map ecological foundations through such iconography and comment on the truth of dwelling in place, humanity within the cosmos.
Please note this paper will be delivered by the panel convenor, as the author is not able to attend the conference in person.

Elizabeth Anderson: "A Wild Little Part of Everything": Pantheistic Spirituality in Garden Literature for Children

This paper considers the spirituality of gardens in three works of children's literature from the early to mid-twentieth century: *The Secret Garden* (1911) by Frances Hodgson Burnett, *The Hedgehog* (1936) by H.D., and Rumer Godden's postwar novel, *An Episode of Sparrows* (1955). I consider a cluster of ideas in this paper. Firstly, I look at the relevance of the Victorian and early twentieth-century pagan revival to modernist garden writing. Secondly, I analyse the relationship between gardens and wilderness and what kind of dwelling they enable for the protagonists of these texts. Thirdly, I will discuss the relationship between gardening and the garden's agency and what this might contribute to an ecotheology that de-centres the human.

Although gardens in these and similar texts are usually presented as homely, nurturing spaces, especially for women, for modernists, the natural is not entirely hospitable. David Abram and David Ezzy explore the sublime, the hidden and the Levinasian other in relation to the natural world.[1] They help us trace the significance of alterity – of the life of natural spaces, whether wild or cultivated, as other to our own – as existing not for us, but unto themselves. I argue that the interplay between human-garden connection and plant-human difference enables an understanding of transcendence as located in the material world.

Anna Fisk: "Behold the Rhino": Collective Guilt and Redemption in Popular Representations of Nature

The religious tenor of 'secular' environmentalism has long been noted by scholarship on green movements; in this paper I suggest that a (quasi)religious dimension to ecological discourse is becoming increasingly mainstream. Thinking autoethnographically about my visit to the Natural History Museum Wildlife Photographer of the Year 2017 exhibition, I consider how popular representations of the harm humanity has done to nature—such as the photojournalism represented in the WPY competition, and television documentaries like the BBC's Blue Planet II—have connotations of collective guilt and the need for repentance. My paper centres on the WPY Grand Title winning image: Brent Stirton's 'Memorial to a Species', a black rhino bull, recently shot dead, his horn chopped off by poachers. In this paper I discuss the significance of the choice of such a graphically violent image as the overall winner, in the context of reflections on my teaching of feminist critique of depictions of the suffering Christ/a. I explore how images such as this—or of Sudan, the last male Northern White Rhino, or stills from Blue Planet II of seabirds feeding plastic debris to their young— may perform a role analogous to that of representations of the Passion: engaging with the suffering of the other, and conviction of one's own responsibility for that suffering, thus leading to a renewed commitment to change. I argue that this provisionally-redemptive function of visual depictions of nature—of other-than-human persons—is desperately important whilst being deeply problematic.

Saturday (29 Sept) 9:00-10:30AM Ecotheologies panel – session II

Franz Graf: "What We Know of Aliveness": Ecological Subjectivity and the Search for Truth in a More-than-Human World

This paper attempts to critically engage with "intersubjectivity" and "personhood" in human/environment relations, refusing to place them theoretically in a solely human domain. The rubric of subjectivity has stimulated both ethnographic explorations of things that matter most in people's lives and sensibilities especially with regard to their intersecting with broader processes and contexts. Contemporary concerns and (un)certainties are increasingly related to the anthropogenic ecological devastation of our planet, destabilising well-known concepts, environments and lifeworlds. The ethnography that I will utilize for this objective is part of my (PhD) research, which involved 12

months of fieldwork in South West England (2012-13) conducting participant observation and qualitative interviews with neo-Pagans, environmentalists and "earth lovers". By using an ecological perspective (elaborated by Tim Ingold and others), I have shown that care for the environment and care for human wellbeing are interrelated in the lives of my research assistants. Claiming that social suffering and ecological suffering are two sides of the same truth, they criticise the "myth of progress" and form part of a growing "green" movement. Their desire to be outdoors is closely linked with their ambition to live a "good life", something that gives them meaning and can be morally sustained both for themselves and the environment.

The ethnographic description of affective encounters with "plant-persons" and "animal-persons" shall help to question concepts of subjectivity in terms of their potential to understand human/environment relations without falling back into dichotomies of nature and culture. I am particularly interested in how turning towards other-than-human persons in the subjective lives of people can be analytically understood in the context of an "ecological era": people are not only attending to other humans, but also to other-than-humans, thereby reshaping what it means to be human.

Arianne Conty: Animism in the Anthropocene

Though responses to the Anthropocene have largely come from the natural and social sciences, religious responses to the Anthropocene have also been gaining momentum. From Pope Francis' *Laudato Si,* to eco-feminism, indigenous and neo-pagan ecologies, many scholars have been calling for a religious or spiritual moral response to complement scientific responses in addressing the destruction of the earth. Yet because Genesis 1:28 does indeed tell human beings to "subdue the earth" and "have dominion" over "every living thing that moveth upon the earth," monotheistic religions have often been understood as complicit in the human exceptionalism that is thought to have created the conditions for the Anthropocene. In distinction to such Biblical traditions, anthropologists like Viveiros de Castro, Philippe Descola and Eduardo Kohn have shown that indigenous animistic cultures have typically respected all forms of life as equally "human," and such traditions have thus become a source of inspiration for ecological movements seeking to overcome the anthropocentric bias of Monotheistic cultures. In this paper, I am interested in looking at the ways these contemporary responses to the climate crisis are taking shape, and in particular at the forms of religious syncretism they have given rise to. Focusing particularly on animism and the different ways it has been integrated and transformed in Western discourses, from the work of Catholic theologian Mathew Fox's "creation spirituality" to Psychoanalyst and philosopher Félix Guattari's ecosophy founded in a "machinic animism," I would like to evaluate the risks and benefits that could ensue from a postmodern form of animism that would be global rather than local, and work alongside scientific truth instead of in opposition to it. Finally, I hope to show that such a response might provide a necessary postsecular response to the Anthropocene.

Chinyere Lilian Nkama: Re-imagining Igbo Religio-cultural Truth for Preservation of Nature

This paper recalls various homogeneous cultural practices of the Igbo that helped safeguard the ecosystem within the place in the past. It is geared towards exploring how those religio-cultural nuggets could be resuscitated in today's modern world. The researcher adopts both socio-scientific and historical methods of data collection in a social and historical survey which seeks to address a social issue. As such, data are collected through oral/personal communication, use of available data in printed records, reports journals, text books and the internet. The research recommends the following: cultural education, advocacy and ecosystem activism.

LITTERATURE

Friday (28 Sept) 1:00-2:30 PM Litterature panel – session I:
Truth in Theatre and Performance

Eric Ziolkowski: Kierkegaard, James Baldwin, and the Question of Truth in Theater

At first blush, Søren Kierkegaard and James Baldwin may seem a study in contrasts: nineteenth-century white Dane / twentieth-century black American; beneficiary of privileged socio-economic class / member of oppressed, impoverished minority; celibately straight / actively gay; etc. Upon closer scrutiny, however, these two prolific writers, both of them extreme mavericks in their times and places, share some provocative commonalities. Though both preached from the pulpit at different times in their lives (Baldwin as a child-prodigy-minister, Kierkegaard as an adult non-cleric), both maintained tensive, at times condemnatory stances toward their churches. The nickname, "the Fork," which Kierkegaard earned as a child for his "precocious tendency to make satirical remarks," and which anticipates his adult reputation as a fearsome polemicist, could just as aptly describe Baldwin, one of the most poignant, sharpest critics ever of racial injustice in the U.S.

This paper focuses on another commonality between Kierkegaard and Baldwin: their mutual lifelong relationship of both repulsion from, and attraction to, the theater as a literary-performative form, and their concern with the capacity of onstage drama to convey truth. Both men wrote highly perceptive theater criticism, and while Kierkegaard drafted a full-length but never-performed Aristophanic play as a student, Baldwin produced several successful stage dramas, one of them about an African American church family. After considering the two authors briefly against the backdrop of the long Christian tradition of anti-theater polemicizing (traceable back to early North African patristics such as Tertullian and Cyprian), I examine in a range of writings by Kierkegaard and Baldwin specific passages that convey a critical recognition of the drama-like quality of the church, the pulpit-like potential of the stage, and the place of truth in between. In Baldwin's words, "This tension between the real and the imagined *is* the theater, and it is why the theater will always remain a necessity."

Chris Taylor: Hocus Pocus; Performance and truth in the Eucharist

The Lord is here…
Theatrical performance occupies a reality different from that which we normally experience. This reality is created by performers and audience together allowing 'a representation which denies time' (Peter Brook) and authenticating Cranmer's assertion that Jesus' crucifixion and sacrifice for the world was made unique by his 'one oblation of himself once offered.'

Drawing particularly on Brechtian and anti-illusionist acting theory, this paper will use a hermeneutic of performance to examine truth in the Eucharist and the implications of such truth for its participants. In doing so, it will consider the different reality created by performance and the merging of performers and audience.

Attendance at a theatrical performance involves the experience of events bound by space and time and therefore unrepeatable. No two performances are ever exactly the same. Those involved share unique truths. In the production of a play actors take on roles, so in a performance of *Macbeth* David Tennent is not Macbeth and in performing the Eucharist the priest is not Jesus. But, as Richard Schechner has observed, in performance we also know that David Tennent is not *not*-Macbeth. We see the truth of Macbeth's death and know he can die only once. Similarly, in the Eucharist I claim the priest is not *not*-Jesus and we see the truth in Jesus' actions pursuant to his death.

Can the truth of Macbeth and Jesus exist outside the performances which we experience? A hermeneutic of performance allows us to participate with the characters and to share their truth within, and beyond, the event itself.

Charles A. Gillespie: True Doubt: Parables and the Play of Self-Interpretation in *Hamlet* and *Doubt*

The truth of a parable explodes outward from text and from telling. Parables narrate the sort of complex truths that cannot be articulated directly; they clarify and illuminate (possibly even reveal!), but parables refuse to give over some discrete fact or principle to be possessed and wielded like a tool. Interpreters who go in search of one truth hidden behind a text will find parables highlight truth's slipperiness, its relational construction, and its risks to a status quo. The genre is peculiarly well suited for raising uncomfortable theological questions, not only because it seems Jesus' favorite mode of teaching, but because parables restructure our confidence in our own self-understanding. Coordinating insights from Gadamer, Ricouer, and the hermeneutics of parables, this paper explores two dramatic instances of true doubt conjured by equivocal interpretations. For Hamlet, "the play's the thing" where the king's reaction will reveal sure and certain access to truth. I read the Act III dumb show as a fictionalization that fails its mission but nevertheless trips over something true about Hamlet's self-knowledge in response. It is Shakespeare's play that confesses Claudius' deeds, not the Danish prince's site-specific adaptation to *The Murder of Gonzago*. I next turn to treat John Patrick Shanely's acclaimed *Doubt: a parable* (2005) as a theological intervention in response to the global clergy sex abuse crisis. Shanely's theatrical parable works according to the same logic of Hamlet's mousetrap and provokes a confrontation with self-understanding. *Doubt*, as a stage-play, features only four characters (a priest, two Sisters of Charity, and the African-American mother of an alleged abuse victim). The audience plays the role of congregation and confessor to these characters, but I argue that, like Hamlet, what ramifies for theological hermeneutics is the encounter with the truth of oneself illumined by parables. Parables can hold doubt's truth.

Friday (28 Sept) 2:45-4:15 PM Literature panel – session II:
Truth and Transformation

John Derbyshire: Truth as a Catalyst for Change in Denis Johnson's Literary Fiction

In Denis Johnson's first novel *Angels*, one of the main characters has the following thought:

'A couple of times in the past he'd reached this absolute zero of the truth, and without fear or bitterness he realized now that somewhere inside it there was a move he could make to change his life'. (*Angels*, p. 42)

The way Johnson positions this 'absolute zero of the truth' in his fiction, especially in the short stories in *Jesus' Son*, and his most recent stories in *The Largesse of the Sea Maiden*, is as a point from which a change can begin, even though it does not always materialise. Since many of his stories deal with addiction, I read Johnson's dependence on truth as a starting point for change in the light of Jesus's statement in the Gospel of John that 'the truth shall make you free.' (John 8. 32)

The short story 'The Starlight on Idaho' is entirely made up of letters written by Mark Cassandra, who is going through rehab and has been given a drug called Antabuse that causes him to have hallucinations. The place of truth in these epistles is constantly undermined by the acknowledgement of the narrator that he often cannot distinguish between fiction and reality as a result of the Antabuse. But, simultaneously, the character of the letters, the way in which they reveal aspects of the protagonist's life, his inner feelings and his battle against his own short comings, seem to indicate a form of 'truth' telling that constitute a process of change.

By reading 'The Starlight on Idaho' in conjunction with *Angels* and *Jesus' Son*, I will attempt to uncover the moments of truth in Johnson's fiction as forms of revelation that lead to change, as opposed to epiphanies that remain unrealised potentials.

Lizzie Ludlow   Prayer, truth-telling and the outworking of Unitarian faith in Elizabeth
                                 Gaskell's fiction

In a letter recalling the composition of *Mary Barton*, Gaskell comments: 'I wanted to represent the
subject in the light in which some of the workmen certainly consider to be *true*, not that I dare to say it
is the abstract absolute truth'. In this paper, I consider how Gaskell's articulation of the 'agony…
which convulses' her subjects in *Mary Barton* emerges from a particular Unitarian-informed vision of
truth. Extending R.K. Webb's recognition of how Gaskell's 'Unitarianism is not to be found in her
characters but in the dynamics of her narratives and in her comments upon her characters actions', I
trace how her perception of psychological and 'abstract absolute' truth alters through the course of her
writing career. Moreover, I suggest how her engagement with the slipperiness of the language used to
express different understandings of truth can be evidenced through an engagement with the ways in
she connects moments of prayer and reading the Bible with the knowledge of the self and others.
Focusing particularly on moments of prayer in *Mary Barton, North and South*, and *Sylvia's Lovers*, I
offer an analysis of how Gaskell's perception of truth is connected with its precepts of a shared
humanity and the outworking of forgiveness and reconciliation. I conclude with the recognition that
while she retains a commitment to the interface between storytelling, religious practice and social
action, Gaskell's later fiction expresses ambivalence about the move from an emotional recognition of
subjective truth to acts of altruism.

Friday (28 Sept) 4:30-6:30 PM Literature panel – session III:
Modes of Knowing

Kathryn Wills: Translation as Sacramental Hermeneutics: WB Yeats, Yves Bonnefoy
                                 and "Le chagrin de l'amour"

The place of truth seems central to the exercise of translation, because it is the duty of the translator to
show the reader what the original says. My paper, however, will deconstruct this idea of the nature of
truth, suggesting that translation of poetry may present many nuances of the original poem, most of
which relate to the more disparate ideas of the translator. Being true to the original act which gives
birth to the poem is the key requirement which Yves Bonnefoy makes of his own translations of WB
Yeats, suggesting that he seeks to relive this act, clothing the immutable Word in flesh, rather than
merely to reconstruct the poem.
        This paper will explore how such a concept of truth informs these translations, focussing on
the earlier part of Bonnefoy's Yeats collection, mainly Yeats' erotic poetry. I will analyse Bonnefoy's
version of "The Sorrows of Love" and consider the idea that Bonnefoy relives the original act which
creates Yeats' poem in a way which also highlights a sacramental dimension. Where Yeats emphasises
the rejection of aestheticism in the poem, Bonnefoy highlights Maud Gonne as a nexus of suffering –
and opens Yeats to human suffering in general, often obscured for him by natural beauty.
Nonetheless, Bonnefoy also suggests that Maud has been reified by Yeats and, as Yeats' relationship
with Maud remained unrequited, the poem is therefore not about the flesh of consummation for Yeats
but about an objective body. This suggests Maud can only ever be an idol for him, if we analyse the
poem in terms of Jean-Luc Marion's erotic reduction.
        Bonnefoy's new poem, then, expounds a multi-layered vision of truth – true to the original act
creating the poem, to the sacramental quality of human suffering and, finally, to the nature of the
erotic act itself.

Scott Dill: Intimate Truths: A Formalist Theory of Zadie Smith's Informalities

Criticism on Zadie Smith's work has tended to fall into one of two groups. The first primarily
responds to her debut novel *White Teeth* (2000) by exploring how it treats identity. The second group,
largely working from *On Beauty* (2005) and *Changing My Mind* (2008), traces how they think about
ethics and form. While Magdalena Mączyńska notes that religion is "a central concern in all of her

novels," comparatively little criticism has addressed it. The oversight may be due to the fact that, instead of working from within any specific religion, Smith is (by her own admission) a "sentimental humanist." Nevertheless, in the wake of *Swing Time* (2016) and *Feel Free* (2018), I want to suggest that a single religious virtue imbues the formal preoccupations that Smith's has come to be known for: humility.

       In the "Foreward" to *Feel Free* Smith confesses, "I have no real qualifications to write as I do," adding that her "evidence—such as it is—is almost always intimate." This lack of qualifications does not, however, lead her to the same kind of shame and humiliation felt by the characters of *Swing Time*. Instead, it allows her to theorize her writing—both as an essayist and novelist—as a mode of knowing authorized by its capacity to share intimate truths. Drawing on Hannah Arendt's notions of the intimate and the social, this presentation will argue that *Swing Time*'s representations of humiliation and religious belief offer a theory of the novel's formal approach to truth. I will ask to what extent Smith's formalization of humility parallels the New Testament's *kenosis* and its Koranic counterpart in the fourth sura. Finally, by closing with references to Karl Ove Knausgård and Elena Ferrante, I will show how Smith's interest in shame and humiliation participates in a broader trend in the contemporary novel's use of humility as a psychological counterpart to the bawdy truth-telling of Bakhtinian laughter.

Michael Hurley: Attunement to Truth in Literature

Claims for the truth-bearing possibilities of literature are as old as literature itself. Literature is said not merely to contain certain kinds of knowledge, but also to be uniquely able to express certain kinds of knowledge, insofar as it is styled in certain ways. From metaphor and metonymy to myth and metrics: language is characterised as 'literary' by its modes of intimation that are the basis for its unique epistemological authority. Thus, Martha Nussbaum: 'Literary form is not separable from philosophical content, but is, itself, a part of content – an integral part, then, of the search for and the statement of truth'. That standard formalist stance (though easier to state than to demonstrate) is a helpful place to begin. Crucially, however, it overlooks the extent to which literature's truth-bearing capacity is determined not only by what is written and how, but also by the way in which it is read. My paper will consider this missing element, not as a way of encouraging freewheeling reader response (as if literary truth amounted to no more than the reflexive opinion and affect of each individual reader), but as a way of exploring how literature's 'truth' is enabled through the readerly demands it makes upon us. To approach literature in this spirit is to notice how form-content relations invite but also delimit our sense of 'truth': it is to better understand literature's form-content relations by cultivating what, within the purview of religious faith, John Cottingham describes as an 'epistemology of receptivity'. Only through adequate 'attunement' with a particular text, it will be argued, is it possible to 'assent' to that text's particular truth, which arises partly from its form and its content, and partly from us, but is ultimately more than the sum of these parts.

Saturday (29 Sept) 9-10:30 AM Literatur panel – session IV:
Surprising Guides

Amanda Vernon: Reliable Guides? George MacDonald and the Place of Truth in Poetry

In his sermon 'The Truth', George MacDonald writes that the highest understanding of truth is grasped not simply through the intellect, but through a person's entire being. As an individual begins to 'share the life of God himself' she becomes 'a live truth' and her 'real nature […] begins to show itself' (233-4). One of the means by which a person may be guided towards this place of truth – a place MacDonald refers to as 'home' – is through reading literature.

       In both this sermon and his lectures on Dante, MacDonald uses Dante's journey as an example of the journey home. MacDonald re-phrases Dante's own rationale for the journey, writing: 'I am going this journey in order that I may get back to the home where I am now, namely, to the heart of God only' (15). Although an evidently religious work, Dante's *Divine Comedy* sings of the truth-

bearing merits of pagan poetry and its ability to lead the soul towards God. Given that MacDonald was writing at a period in which the boundaries of what was considered to be appropriate religious reading were being re-drawn, his commentary on Dante naturally opens up an interesting point of connection between the writers, and raises some questions as to which poets, in MacDonald's view, should be considered as reliable guides home. Need a poet be overtly religious in order to be a source of truth? And is there such a thing as a secular poet? This paper will answer these questions by considering two sets of texts that explicitly address the discussion – MacDonald's lectures on Dante and his *Unspoken Sermons* (1889) – in order to understand how MacDonald's conception of truth shapes his views on the poet's role in guiding one home.

Joseph Sverker: Unreliable narrator – or to be betrayed into truth

The dwarf in Per Lagerkvist's novel by the same name is notorious as perhaps *the* unreliable narrator in Swedish literature. Lagerkvist plays with the trust a reader has almost by default when taking the perspective of a first person narrator. This trust, even if it has to be established, has to be broken down by means of episodes that do not add up, or that makes the reader suspicious about the correctness of the events, in order for the narrator to be questioned. Even then, the truth only comes through the perspective of this unreliable narrator. As such, the only way to truth for the reader is to let her- or himself be betrayed.

  For some this insight that truth is neighbour with betrayel translates into a method. Both Søren Kierkegaard and Lars Ahlin use this "indirect" or "maieutic" method to be let both characters as well as readers be betrayed into truth (Kierkegaard – "bedrage ind i det Sande"). For both of them this is the most reliable(!) way to truth. It is by betraying that birth can be given to truth for Kierkegaard and Ahlin. If that is so, the question of the relation between unreliability and truth is not necessarily only that of how the reader is to find out "what really happened" when the narrator is unreliable like the dwarf. Fiction is after all an art of believable betrayal, betraying the reader into believing the story, so the question of unreliability and truth must be central to fiction over all.

  I want to argue that by looking at Kierkegaard's and Ahlin's methods as well as taking some examples from literature of unreliable narrators, that something can be said about the relation between fiction and truth in more general terms.

Christine Chou: *True* Possibilities of Existence—unto Death or into Life:
          Revisiting the Holocaust Memoir, *Night*, through Kierkegaard

This paper aims to do a Kierkegaardian reading of Elie Wiesel's *Night*, a most memorable and nihilistic book about Auschwitz which discloses to the world the truth about our civilization, modernity, and faith in humans and God: everything that establishes the human value, strength, and dignity is not only shakable but all destructible into nothing. Through Kierkegaard, we endeavor to inquire: How possibly can such a "dark" text of Holocaust literature be interpreted in order to seek for the *truth* of salvation for human beings in despair?

  The central perspective is derived from Kierkegaard's ideas of religious anthropology in *The Sickness unto Death*, i.e., the human self as spirit and potentially sick of despair but remediable in faith. Through appropriating Kierkegaard's existential and contrasted concepts of despair (*sickness unto death*) and faith as salvation (*self into life*), the paper intends to venture deep into the "dead-land" existence in Wiesel's text and ponder over the potentiality of existence within a de-humanized universe (Auschwitz) which is dictated by impossibility of meaning and salvation as well as absence of God. Moreover, with Kierkegaard's notion of "anxiety through faith" in *The Concept of Anxiety*, i.e., the anxiety, in alliance with faith, that may lead the spirit into the infinite possibility of transcending death (the deceptive end of the finite), this interpretation will reflect on whether the narrator's "death imprint" and anger is associable with anxiety of meaning and living and possibly a means of rebellion against despair and even death.

  Ultimately, this Kierkegaardian reading attempts to address the crucial questions—problem of self, challenges of despair and death, anxiety of meaning, and possibility of belief and salvation—that

are not only involved in Wiesel's memoir but also related to the shadows and *true* existential possibilities we all confront and share in the modern world.

Saturday (29 Sept) 3:20-4:50 PM Literature panel – session V: Philosophy and Form

Philip Mills: A Nietzschean Approach to Poetic Truth

In the *Republic*, Plato evaluates poets negatively because their lies might endanger the philosophical achievement he aims to reach with his city. This negative evaluation of poetry has been a ground to deny poetry any access to truth. In this context, a poetic truth sounds like a contradiction. The history of philosophy has however not stopped with Plato and many philosophical conceptions of the relation between poetry and truth have been elaborated. Nietzsche famously inverts Plato's conception by considering poetry to be as, if not more, valuable than philosophy in our relation to truth. He therefore not only wrote philosophical texts with poetic aspects but also poems as such. In this paper, I offer a reading of Nietzsche's poem "Only Fool, Only Poet!" which sets my interpretative perspective on poetic truth. Starting with a famous quote from Nietzsche, "Truth is ugly. We possess *art* lest we *perish of the truth*", I will show that far from Plato's fear of poetry, poetic truth is necessary not only to our everyday concerns, but also to knowledge in general. From this Nietzschean perspective, I will then explore three poems discussing the question of truth: Emily Dickinson's "Tell All the Truth", Walt Whitman's "All Is True", and Kate Tempest's "The Truth". My Nietzschean reading of these poems sets the ground to elaborate a poetic theory of truth (rather than a theory of poetic truth). In this context, poetry is not the enemy of truth but has a role to play in making sense of truth.

Matthew Moser: Dante's Conversion of Poetics

In this paper I apply J.L. Austin's concept of speech-act theory and its attendant concept of "performative utterances" to explore Dante's *Commedia* as a poetic performance of truth-telling through linguistic practices of self-knowledge, confession, reconciliation, and prayer. In Austin's *How to do Things with Words*, he develops a theory of the dynamic interplay in human speech between locutionary (ostensible meaning), illocutionary (intended meaning), and perlocutionary (actual effect) of our language. I adopt the relationship between these linguistic acts and argue that there is a familial relationship between them and the techniques Dante deploys in the *Commedia* explore, confess, and correct his own earlier poetics, especially those found in *Vita Nuova*. Building on recent scholarship that argues for an interpretation of Dante's *Commedia* as an exercise of the *ars poetica*, I argue that Dante models poetry's truthfulness as coming through poetry's ability to *effect* what it *narrates*.

        The procedure of the paper is as follows. I begin with an overview of both Austin's speech-act theory and the relationship of Dante's *Commedia* to his earlier poetic works. I then develop Dante's notion of poetry's connection to theological and philosophical truth, describing poetry as an instrument of self-knowledge through its unique power to explore the darker contours of the self. Finally, I turn to specific examples in the *Commedia* in which Dante's poetry functions as a performative utterance for confessing the failures of his early poetry (*Inferno* 5 and 15), reconciling with a friend whom Dante abused in his early work (*Purgatorio* 23-24), and prayerfully embracing the virtue of humility and rejecting pride (*Inferno* 26, *Purgatorio* 10, and *Paradiso* 33). From this I conclude that Dante develops a poetic theory in which poetry's truthfulness lies in its ability to perform its own conversion from the profane to the divine.

Sunday (30 Sept) 9:00-10:30 AM Literature panel – session VI:
The Ethics of Contested Narratives

Matthew Cooper Harriss: "John Brown's Weird Body and the Truth of Religious
Historical Fiction"

Maya Jasanoff argues that Melville's "Benito Cereno" offers "something a historian would be hard-pressed to achieve: . . . build[ing] dramatic power through the misperceptions of an unreliable narrator, and follow[ing] this with an explosive revelation of truth." Her observation aligns with John Lukacs's claim that "certain novels tell us more about a certain time and certain people than even the best of histories." Fiction, of course, is *untrue*, though it serves as second-order truth telling. History is *true* insofar as it points to archival sources, though the fulsomeness of such truth may be limited by any number of contingencies. This paper argues that a third category of *truth*—the category of religion— illuminates and clarifies this imperfect nexus of historical fiction. Toward these ends it reads James McBride's *The Good Lord Bird* (2013)—an historical novel that presents an absurd (even grotesque) account of the 19th century US abolitionist John Brown—in conjunction with Ted Smith's *Weird John Brown* (2015), a source offering a "negative political theology" concerning "divine violence" and the limits of an ethics that seeks to secularize, manage, and thus to diminish such violence. Reading McBride's weird John Brown through the theological lens of Smith's *Weird John Brown* highlights religion's utility for making better sense of what Georg Lukàcs deems the fragments and contradictions of historical fiction: Religion reflects on these spaces in-between history and fiction, *truth* and *untruth*, offering a critical disposition capacious enough to contend with both ultimacy and its constructedness. This uncanny weirdness enables McBride's John Brown, in keeping with Smith's John Brown, to fracture pieties surrounding American slavery and racism by reproducing these historical antecedents in the grotesque boldface of "religious historical fiction," highlighting the ethical urgency such antecedents bring as neither dead nor past in an evolving present-tense.

Keith Hanley: The Holy Land and the Uses of Religion in Victorian Literature

A consideration of the Abrahamic religions' literary possession of Palestine. It compares Evangelical allegories and some guides to the Bible Lands with the proto-Zionism of Disraeli's *Tancred*, Eliot's *Daniel Deronda* and her late essay, "The Modern Hep! Hep! Hep!" These appropriations are reviewed in the light of controversies persisting around Said's *The Question of Palestine* and current discussions about liberal Eurasianism.

GENDER AND RELIGION

Saturday (29 Sept) 1:30-3:00 PM Gender and Religion panel – session I:
Power/Oppression and Truth

Myung-Joo Kim: Toward Ecstasy via Violation: Re-spelling the Symbolism of Blood-Flower-Tree in a Korean Novelist Han Kang's *The Vegetarian*

Despite a tremendous explosion of public and critical interest in Han Kang's *The Vegetarian* since it won the 2016 Man Booker International Prize, the three-sectioned novel has been not only disturbing and incomprehensible generally but also further misinterpreted even by critics. The novel's heroin, Younghye's bloody nightmarish dream in the first section particularly is at the center of all the misinterpretation in which blood is symbolized as human cruelty almost always when given attention, thus being a clue to the novel's downright criticism against modern carnivorous, patriarchal, or capitalistic violence. Although there is no doubt that its critical stance naturally posits against such violence, I contend that the frequent blood imagery, in fact, refers to something else, that is, much more primitive, wild, ancient, rather positive feminine creativity and life force, not to negative bloody

violence. This new interpretation of blood in terms of its ancient symbolism further makes it possible to achieve a thematic unity along with the other two sections of the novel, that is, the incestual flower-indulgence of the second and the suicidal tree-becoming in the third, both of which have been considered thematically at odds with the first. In this presentation, I will argue how the blood-flower-tree symbolism of the novel could be reinterpreted by introducing the pre-patriarchal Great Mother Goddess tradition in which blood positively represents women's creative power of giving birth and love to the world along with flowers and trees. My textual analysis will focus on how the writer Han Kang is subconsciously aware of the ancient symbolism as evidenced in her description, "blood **blooming** from Younghye's finger" for instance, in which it is obvious that the writer equates 'blood' to blooming 'flowers.' Newly interpreting three symbols, my presentation attempts to ultimately answer the question that the author said in the press she herself had intended to pose in the novel, that is, "what it means to live in the world strewn with violence [violation] and beauty [ecstasy] at the same time."

Clare Radford: Making Women's Experiences, Unfolding Feminist Truths: Evaluating the 'Intimate Authority' of Artists' Books

In this paper I explore the making of women's experiences with and through artists' books in order to critically reflect on how we encounter others in embodied ways, ways that are at once intimate and public. Artists' books – unique forms or small print runs that combine texts, image, and textiles – circumvent traditional power structures in publishing. As Drucker notes, women are particularly involved in this form as it offers an 'intimate authority' in which making books 'out of the material of their lives' enables finding a balance between 'enclosure and exposure'. For this, I focus on two areas: firstly on women's experiences of illness and healthcare – with particular reference to Martha Hall who made over 100 books whilst living with and being treated for breast cancer. Secondly, I focus on women's experience of sexual violence, and artists' books that aim to read together different women's experience of sexual assault and harassment. I argue that in foregrounding their materiality, these pieces raise questions about the nature of embodied encounters with others as a feminist praxis of meaning-making.

Kristine Whaley: Conversations as We Sit: A Revision of the Imagio Dei Through Jean Rhys' Women

As I work on an understanding of the *imago Dei*, I take part in the conversation that we must view humanity in context, whether that be singular experiences or as a community. As postcolonial feminist theologian Kwok Pui-lan argues we must listen to know the truth--not only to know when there is oppression, but how the oppressed might live in context with the oppressor. She believes we must see the work "in the commitment to communal survival and in creating social networks and organizations so that she and her community can be healed and flourish."
I will explore this communal concept of the *imago Dei* in conversation with one of Jean Rhys' short stories, "On Not Shooting Sitting Birds." Rhys' characters primarily are not able to overcome their struggles, and they often begin to actively hurt themselves as they continue to draw away from society. Her women do not find themselves, find pleasure or success, or even find true community. Yet how can we retroactively bring them into relationship to learn their truth from them?

Sunday (30 Sept) 9:00-10:30 AM Gender and Religion panel – session II:
Truth and Critical Readings of Experience

Hanna Marije Altorf: Women Philosophers and Common Sense, Or, Why We Should Care More About Truth And Claim It Less

Women … are more reluctant to abandon common sense.[1]

An important aspect of feminist analysis is to take personal experience seriously, to tell stories, to try and listen to voices that would otherwise go unheard. This practice is an important tool in challenging power relations. In the field of philosophy there is an additional reason to take experience seriously. This is Socrates' famous phrase 'The unexamined life is not worth living' (*Apology* 38a).

It is then surprising to find that even philosophers who are either avowed feminists or admirers of Plato (or both) acknowledge the significance of experience and yet never speak of any of their own experiences. In this paper I shall consider one such thinker, the British philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch.

Murdoch acknowledges the significance of experience throughout her writing. Yet, her references to experience are general or even fictional. She often refers to, for instance, 'the virtuous peasant', a fiction straight out of the 19th century novels she admires so much.

Why does Murdoch value experience, but not talk about it? In this paper I offer two reasons. I first argue that for Murdoch language often mystifies and fantasy trumps imagination. She doubts that it is possible to tell an experience truthfully and thus she does not tell the experience at all. Secondly, Murdoch's concern for experience is inspired by G.E. Moore's writing about common sense, where experiences are stated as ineffable truths.

It is in this notion of common sense that I look for a solution out of this conundrum. I shall argue that common sense understood as *sensus communis* (inspired by Arendt's reading of Kant) balances any truth claim of experience with an acknowledgement and investigation into what is common.

CONTINENTAL PHILOSOPHY AND THEOLOGY

Friday (28 Sept) 1:00-2:30 PM Continental Philosophy and Theology panel – session I

Andrew Hass, "Devilish Truths in Mann's Dr. Faustus"

The still dominant reading of Thomas Mann's *Dr. Faustus* is political, the composer Adrian Leverkühn embodying his German nation of the 1930s, as it descends into the damnation that was National Socialism. The genius artist here confronts his dark *genie* in the darkest of circumstances, and succumbs to the most nefarious of pacts. And everything is sacrificed, including music itself, which must bear the burden of the genius. But what if a deeper truth is at work here, one that does not see music, and the artist self who creates it, as *victim*, political or otherwise, but as the very mode of a resounding truth beyond darkness? This paper will suggest that the framing of truth spectrally in darkness and light, as Mann himself frames the musical creations of Leverkühn under the guidance of Adorno, obscures another kind of truth, one reached not through metaphors of the specular but of the sonorous. By looking more closely at the nature of sound, and music's coming to be from sound, particularly as it was being worked out in German Idealism, first by the younger Schelling and then later in Hegel, where creation's freedom involves a certain nihilating movement, a different kind of truth is allowed to emerge. This truth leaves behind appearance, whether in terms of illusion or enlightenment, and draws us into an oscillation between what is and what is not, between what is presented and what is cancelled, and towards the reconciliation of these oppositions. Music thus becomes something more than Adorno's historicised expression of an individual's or a culture's progression or regression; it calls us to the contradictions that remain resonant in the very core of being. The paper will ask, in reworking Schelling and Hegel: might the struggle between these two "truths" – the dark truth of an enlightenment gone wrong, and a sonorous truth that allows for necessary contradiction – be Leverkühn's greatest dilemma, as he tries to reconcile his music with his genie, his genius with his muse? Here the narrator's biography would be more about how to reconcile two diametric but inevitable modes of art's truth than it would be about an apparent victory of one over the other. And if that struggle remains an abiding force beyond the cataclysms of the twentieth century, might this be because, ethically, we have not yet been reconciled to a self-disruptive truth that itself requires, as a sonorous mode, reconciliation between its own multiplicities?

Deborah Casewell: "Representation, Truth, and Bildung - Mann's triumph over
                          Hegel"

Thomas Mann's short stories span the length of his career, culminating in Death in Venice. Mann's philosophical outlook, heavily influenced by Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, comes out in these stories in what will be argued as an anti-Hegelian point of view. Mann's writings sit uneasily within the tradition of the Bildungsroman, and of Bildung, detailed in Hegel, where the individual journeys through understanding to fulfillment in the conceptual. However, in two of his short stories, *Little Herr Friedemann* and *Death in Venice*, the structured, conceptual life of both central characters is wrecked by the irruption of aspects of the representational life, a 'visitation' (*Heimsuchung*) of physical intensity that derails the life of the mind. These subvert and destroy the emphasis on progression away from the representational. In these stories, focusing in particular on *Death in Venice*, Mann shall be explored as anti-*Bildung*. They show that *Bildung* is ruptured by the world, by representation, which can never be moved beyond or cast aside. The implications this has for Hegel's account of truth and understanding will be explored, alongside whether Mann's critique can move from a negative account of *Bildung* to a positive account of truth and embodiment.

Saturday (29 Sept) 3:20-4:50 PM Continental Philosophy and Theology panel – session II

Jennifer Geddes: "Vulnerable Facts, Trustworthy Witnesses and Secure Dwelling Places:
                          Hannah Arendt on Lying in Politics"

In her essay "Lying in Politics," Hannah Arendt's analysis of lying, its history in political life, and the new forms it had taken in her contemporary moment help us, both substantively and methodologically, as we try to understand and respond to the place of truth today. Further, Arendt's depiction of factual truth as fragile, in danger, vulnerable, and in need of "testimony and trustworthy witnesses" is suggestive for thinking not only about how we might seek to uphold the importance of facts and truths, but also how we might support vulnerable populations that are rendered even more vulnerable by the manipulation and distortion of the very ideas of truth and facts and lies.

         In the essay, which was written in response to the release of the *Pentagon Papers*—a "top secret" report revealing the systematic lying of the U.S. federal government to the American public and to Congress about its involvement in Vietnam—Arendt argues that "facts need testimony to be remembered and trustworthy witnesses to be established in order to find a secure dwelling place in the domain of human affairs" (6). There is something both moving and challenging in this depiction of factual truth: it needs our care, even as we are reminded elsewhere in her essay that we need it as "the chief stabilizing factor" in our ever-changing human affairs. That which is fragile and in danger is also that which stabilizes our shared political life. What might it mean to offer testimony in such a way that facts will be remembered, to become a trustworthy witness, to ensure that facts find a secure dwelling place in our midst? Is there a connection between our responsibilities towards the vulnerable texture of factual truths and towards those populations rendered vulnerable in our contemporary moment? Further, might this responsibility be not quite as one-directional as we depict it to be? Just as factual truths, even with their vulnerable status, serve as the "chief stabilizing factor" of our political life, might those populations rendered vulnerable in our contemporary moment also be necessary to the stability and coherence of our public life?

Patrik Fridlund: "Jacques Derrida and Post-truth"

Starting in a reading of Jacques Derrida, philosopher Jeffrey Nealon claims that what is 'true' in politics cannot simply be seen in terms of 'constatives'. He therefore employs the term 'performative truth'. There are a number of reasons to that, and certain implications. In this paper I examine what Nealon means by this, to what extent it may be helpful when analysing what has been labelled a 'post-truth society', and how the work of Derrida could be a vital component if one wants to resist things like the infamous use of 'alternative facts' in such 'post-truth society'. A 'post-truth society', has been

defined as a society in which '"objective facts" are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief'. This also implies a society in which fake news is disseminated on purpose and where obviously false statements are justified as 'alternative facts'. A consequence is that nothing can be trusted and that nothing is what it seems to be; everything is floating. Postmodern theory in general, and Derrida's philosophy in particular, are frequently blamed for legitimatising this political and societal phenomenon. I agree with Nealon saying that there are certain traits in 'postmodernism' that apparently lend themselves to this, but also that Derrida's philosophy may be the most appropriate starting point for resisting a 'post-truth society'. It seems that it is not possible to rebut false statements simply by pointing at 'the real truth'. Trump's success reminds us of that. Nealon concludes that political truth is not built upon the logic of the fact but on what effect a statement produces—political truth is 'performative truth'. Therefore, to engage with the concept of the performative—in the spirit of Austin and Derrida—is required. The aim of this paper is to investigate traits of a 'post-truth society' and their apparent relation with 'postmodern theory' in order to suggest ways out of the land of 'alternative facts' while maintaining a critical perspective on the belief that it is enough to refer to 'objective truth' and 'bare facts', and rely on their convincing force in the argumentation.

Maria Essunger: Forgotten and future truths: narration as gatekeeper

As time passes, we have to realize that soon there will be no survivors of the Holocaust left to tell their truths. Truths that are not just other in relation to the truths that the German Nazis presented during the dehumanizing era, but also other in relation to truths presented by scientific research in different academic disciplines in its aftermaths. Shoah has, for a long time, been an inherent part of the Jewish and European experience, but could shortly – or already – be seen as an extreme historical event among others. Can we still hear, as Primo Levi presented it, 'the real' witnesses of the Shoah? Why is it important? In *The Drowned and the Saved* he firmly presents the ambitious *purpose* of his text, namely to answer the most urgent question that worries everyone who read a narrative of a witness: how much of the concentration camp world is gone and won't return, like slavery and norms for dueling? How much has returned or is coming back? What can each one of us do so that at least this threat can be eliminated in this threatening world? In his different testimonies he invites the reader to hear the story of what he calls the 'sub-human lives', to keep on telling that story over and over again and, to ask the reader to actively take part in this, for the human race crucial, storytelling. Nevertheless, he does it, well aware of it, from a safe spot, as a survivor.

Etty Hillesum, 'a real' witness according to Levi, tells us her truths in the midst of hell, through her diaries and letters, while dying in the camps. Trustingly, she reads and relates to literature to understand the world that she is part of. She sees her own writing as serious and silly, but finally necessary. Her texts can be seen as 'self-portraits' that offers a special entry to truths that are about to be forgotten. I would like to present them as a micro cosmos, as she narrates herself and her little part of reality rather than the state of the world at stake. Yet, through this micro cosmos, we might get a special entry to a bigger context, the extreme reality that she is part of and the vulnerable situation of ourselves. Why can her narratives be an authoritative answer to Levis urgent question?

Sunday (30 Sept) 11:00-12:30 AM Continental Philosophy and Theology panel – session III

Jason Alvis: "'The Truth of the Play of the Gods': Eugen Fink and a Post-secular Age beyond Facticity"

"The truth of the play of the gods is the play of the world. " (Fink 2016, 169) That is, the way, appearance, type, or kind of play the gods employ, or that characterize God's *acts* most fundamentally, is the same way, appearance, type, or kind of play that characterizes our relation with the world. Our engagement in the place and time in the cosmos of activity (as our shared time and duration in this world, *Saeculum*), and the means by which it comes about, is playful. In part, this is because, for Fink

"play is thus what appears to be raised up above all human measure into the super-human." (144, Fink 2016). Humankind struggles, works, and dies. The god's play.

A reflection on "truth" here is essential, and for Fink it takes on a speculative, phenomenological, and dynamic role *as* play. Eugen Fink's role as "Assistant" to both Husserl and Heidegger often diminishes the value of his own work and acheivements. Thus his fecund work goes unnoticed, and his understanding of religion is yet to be explicated in the secondary literature. Religion is *essential* to the truth of play, and should be contextualized alongside the rigidity of *Faktizität* or facticity prominent in 20th century thought. Although beginning in German philosophy (Fichte - factuality, Dilthey - the non-explainable), facticity points to how we cope with the *conditions* of human contingency. Heideggerian *Geworfenheit* or "thrownness" into the world is a brute fact that cannot be overcome, manifesting itself in moods. Sartrean facticity and its inevitability is precisely that which human freedom calls us to overcome, without blaming external causes for not exercising volition. "Meillassouxian" ("Time without Becoming") facticity concerns what is absent of reason or explication, as the existence of all beings lack an *absolute,* ultimate grounding.

This presentation will 1:) furnish a basic introduction to Fink's concept of play in his Magnum Opus *Spiel als Weltsymbol;* 2:) make explicit the role of religion in this understanding of play; and 3:) unfold the implications Fink's concept of play has for developing a unique means of understanding truth in the specific context of overcoming facticity.

Matthew Graham: "Truth at the Edge of Hermeneutics"

Philosophical hermeneutics in the modern era, especially with Gadamer's ontological turn, is characterized by its articulation of the act of human understanding. Truth, then, prior to any discussions of its correspondence to reality or its coherence with other truths always takes shape within human understanding which is always a dialogical, relational interaction with another (or many others). The assumption here is that the human is a meaning-making creature, a "hermeneute," alive in a world replete with the need for the interpretative act.

But what happens when our various conversation partners—be they other humans, texts, films, or works of art—resist the conventions of human language? What is the hermeneuticist to do when her conversation partner stands mute, and yet is still present? Where is meaning to be found if the relational dialogue is absent? Moreover, can we still pursue the truth under these circumstances? Broadly, these questions stage an encounter between philosophical hermeneutics and the contemporary material turn extant in the humanities. Put differently, questions of this variety take us to the edge of hermeneutics where the decentering of the human projects of meaning, language, and truth occur.

In this paper I wish to further explore this liminal space by constructing a triptych that will prove heuristically rich. Hermeneutics (in the Heidegerrian-Gadamerian register), Catherine Brown's work on "surface reading," and emergent forms of New Materialism will be brought together. This constellation of work, in my view, represents stages along the way from a deeply rooted humanism (hermeneutics), to a particular variety of materialism that resists the hermeneutic impulse of meaning making (Brown), to New Materialisms that seek to decenter the human, logocentric project. This is fertile ground where questions of language, ethics, and politics will quickly arise. I, however, will track the truth. My primary interest is to ask what happens to truth when we vacate or diminish the logocentric frameworks so deeply embedded in Western scholarship.

Andrew Benjamin: "God and the Truth of Human Being"

Arguments that attempt to establish the truth of propositions usually link truth claims to knowledge claims. As such truth cannot be separated from the broader project of epistemology. Within that context atheism and theism are no more than oppositional claims set within a context created by the identification of God with a possible (or impossible) object of knowledge. The contention that underpins this paper is that if there is a counter to an epistemological conception of truth, it is ground in the ontological. Two important consequences emerge. Firstly, another conception of God and the

relation between God and human being then becomes possible. Within it the question of the being of being human acquires centrality. Secondly, the interpretive problems posed by the tradition of the *imitatio dei* acquires a new orientation.

At the outset, this repositioning can be located in Descartes. While Descartes advances proofs for the existence of God he also suggests in the *Third Meditation* that the presence of God is linked to a sense of the infinite. As the Latin text makes clear what is at stake is a type of perception. The finite and thus finitude are after effects of the infinite. As a result of this conception of the infinite it is possible to argue that the sense of self to which it gives rise has to be thought in terms of the co-presence of the infinite and the finite. In other words, the claim about the co-presence of infinite and the finite is a claim at the centre of a philosophical anthropology. Allowing for the infinite as a quality of the human has to be taken up since it affirms the ineliminability of the infinite as internal to human being. (Hence the reorientation of the *imitatio dei*.) Again, what will be explored in the paper is the following question; if the inscription of the infinite as a necessary quality of human being obtains, then is it possible to think the being of being human other than as *being-with-God*.