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BODY-CENTERED CONSTRUCTIVISM AND LIVED RELIGION IN PHOTOJOURNALISM: VISUAL ANALYSES AND A CREATIVE CASE STUDY

by

Klinton Charles-Jones McGinnis

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the Master of Arts
degree in Journalism
in the Graduate College of
The University of Iowa

August 2016

Thesis Supervisor: Assistant Professor Brian Ekdale

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Graduate College
The University of Iowa
Iowa City, Iowa

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MASTER'S THESIS

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Klinton Charles-Jones McGinnis

has been approved by the Examining Committee for
the thesis requirement for the Master of Arts degree
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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to utilize the dual frameworks of Body-Centered Constructivism and Lived Religion to analyze the work of contemporary photojournalists and documentary photographers. Interviews were conducted with a targeted selection of professional and non-professional photojournalists whose experiences and work were relevant to the Body-Centered Constructivist framework. Informants were asked to comment on how physical factors including but not limited to new photographic technologies affected the use of their bodies while on assignment, their interpretation of stories, and their relationships with their subjects.

Next, visual analyses of works of photojournalism were conducted using a Lived Religion framework. These works were selected based on their relevance to the research questions presented, namely how photojournalists approach the mundane in coverage of religious stories.

An additional creative component operated as a case study for applying each framework to a work of visual journalism. Various media were employed based on relationships fostered between the media, the photographer's body, and the subjects. Reflections and conclusions based on this project are included.

PUBLIC ABSTRACT

This study sought to address two questions simultaneously: How does a photojournalist's body affect the way he or she approaches subjects and tell stories, and how can a broader understanding of religious life help photojournalists better cover stories with religious themes?

The first question was explored by approaching the photojournalists themselves. In a series of targeted interviews, photojournalists with significant experiences related to their bodies were asked how physical factors influenced their work. For the purposes of this study their bodies were not seen as limited to flesh and bones, but also the tools that accompanied them in their work, including both their photographic technologies and their clothing choices.

The second question was approached by analyzing works of visual journalism that had religious themes and assessing their approach to the mundane aspects of religion, the effortless practices and rituals that may be more difficult to capture photographically.

A creative component exploring both of these questions was also included. This work of journalism used multiple technological and body configurations to approach a story with religious themes that were not always explicit.

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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

"Photojournalist," as a term used to describe a specific profession, is becoming difficult for editorial photographers to justify by itself. Having long used the term to describe themselves and market their services, photojournalists now use an array of modifiers in their job descriptions (Figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Three photojournalists offering similar services market themselves with terms Photographer, Visual Journalist, Multimedia Journalist, Documentary Storyteller, and Photographer/Photojournalist.

It's not that various titles haven't been used before. News photographers have always had a market interest in diversifying their skill set. But even the National Press Photographers Association, photojournalism's largest and oldest trade organization, founded in 1946, considered changing its name to The Society of Visual Journalists in 2008 in an attempt to represent more broadly the variety in its membership (Bock, 2012; NPPA, 2008). "New technologies" and "economic realities," the same terms newsrooms have used to explain layoffs that have cut photojournalism jobs nearly in half since 2000 (Pew, 2013), are changing the ways photojournalists define themselves and their work.

Central to the discourse around shifts in photojournalism is the rapid advancement

of technology available to photojournalists through the cameras they already use: Canon and Nikon DSLRs (and, increasingly, mirrorless systems from Sony, Fuji, and Panasonic) (Sony Corporation of America, 2015). The most obvious of these advances is the addition of video capabilities to these cameras, but incremental advances in semiconductor technology which lead to higher dynamic range and cleaner low-light sensitivity make the professional's camera an all-purpose "memory card plus darkroom" (Srinivasan, 2010). The ubiquity of advanced editing software and market forces that drive photojournalists to diversify has led to an explosion in multimedia content from photojournalists that is expanding the definition of news photography altogether.

Photojournalists trained primarily in still photography are being asked (or forced) to shoot video features using their DSLRs and mobile technology as the first in the three levels of multi-media (Quinn, 2011). With little training in videojournalism, photojournalists are grappling with questions that are familiar to broadcast photographers and filmmakers, such as whether or not to use a voiceover, or whether it's appropriate to ask an interview subject to walk down a street to gather b-roll. At the same time, these photographers are working hard to distinguish themselves from both broadcast photographers and reporter-photographers who are increasingly being trained in iPhone or snapshot photography (Bock, 2011).

During the course of these industry shifts, photographers, photojournalists, and visual artists have continued to challenge the notion of the photograph or video as an accurate representation of "the real thing": a medium that "asserts its power as that of sheer presence, without signification" (Ranciere, 2003). This becomes particularly salient when the relative ease of creating technically and compositionally proficient photographs

leads to a demand for images that appeal to a particularly marketable photojournalistic style: "After Photoshop, realism is an effect" (Ribalta, 2007). "Commodified imagery," wrote World Press Photo juror Donald Weber, actually "threatens photographers' primary role as storytellers" (Weber, 2015). Weber argues that his quietly stitched multiple exposures of the conflict in Ukraine (Figure 1.2), with overcast gray as the primary color motif, provide a break from the predictably dramatic, wide-angle, amber-and-teal (a popular color theme in blockbuster cinema), Molotov cocktail-throwing

This image is a composite of 9 image files. Look closely and you'll see one man with a severed head, one man with half a skull and one man dismembered at the waist—not literally, they just appear so-due to the stitch I made in post production. I left these anomalies in so as to "prove" that the images are not real. I have nothing to hide. There is much more action here than there was in any single view I had at Maidan. But it's representative of what it felt like to be there. What we see in media—in mediated forms—is hyper reality. Nothing is real.

Figure 1.2: *A photo illustration by Donald Weber created by stitching together multiple frames.*

images of the Kiev revolution popular in news media. In a way, Weber's multiple exposure stitches, which resist both Cartier-Bresson's (1952) "decisive moment" and the expectation of realism (some of the figures in his photos lost their heads in the stitching process) are an application of the advice of Deluze and Guattari (1987) to "make maps,

not photos or drawings.” In 50 years, Weber seems to argue, we may look back on photojournalism from this period and realize it says more about the photographers and the economic interests of the news agencies they were working for than the stories themselves.

One of photography’s most basic definitions is a method of recording information from reflected photons, but photographers are careful not to assume that that is the extent of the photograph or video’s correspondence with reality. One American photojournalist, Stacy Kranitz, publicly voiced her struggle with writing captions, questioning their effectiveness in adding to the image medium (Figure 1.3).

Figure 1.3: *A commentary on image captions from photographer Stacy Kranitz on her Instagram feed.*

Kranitz is here expressing her frustration over the power of written text to constrain the graphic text of the photograph: “I don’t like telling people how to read an image.” When it comes to traditional print media, though, the argument over whether or not to

"tell" viewers how to read an image by giving them additional information in a caption is fairly settled (Srinivasan, 2010). The features and affordances of new media are reintroducing questions of authorship and signification to a new generation of photojournalists. In photojournalism analysis, it is necessary to use a framework that takes these questions into account.

Theoretical Framework 1: Objectivist vs. Constructivist Approaches

The current changes in photography are important but not unprecedented. New photographic technology, be it the Leica M3, the Canon 5D Mark II, or the iPhone 5s, affords the photojournalist with a new set of possibilities but does not alone determine how he or she will act. Neither does the market alone necessarily compel photojournalists to uniformly act in certain ways. In the end, neither the technology nor the market reality tells the story without first passing through a human mediator, the photojournalist.

To account for the maze of factors influencing a photojournalist's use of and interaction with the text, it is necessary to see the photojournalist as acting within a kind of narrative ecology (Newton, 2001). Here messages are being interpreted and reinterpreted, encoded and decoded (Hall, 1980), first by the stakeholders who send a photographer to a scene, then by the photographer's recognition of an appropriate scene and his use of the available technology to frame it, then in the photojournalist's production of a narrative from the raw material they acquired on the scene, then to the audience based partly on the medium through which they view the text, and finally back to the stakeholders and content producers.

The overlooked element in this cycle is the photojournalist's physical manifestation: his or her body, its place within the environment being photographed, and

its relationship with reality. It can be argued that the photographer does in fact create the reality he records, in a strictly "Word becoming flesh" sense, as James Carey (1989) argues: "reality is brought into existence, is produced, by communication," or as Susan Sontag (1977) put it: "To collect photographs is to collect the world." But the objectivist ethic of photojournalism is that the photographer *does not* create the reality but simply records it. This is why stitched photographs like Weber's would need to be clearly labeled as "illustrations" if they were to be entered in World Press Photo competitions (Campbell, 2014). Even pictures of pictures, like Associated Press photographer Daniel Ochoa de Olza's tightly-cropped pictures of memorial photos at public sites after the November 13 terrorist attacks in Paris, were pulled from the 2015 World Press Photo contest after winning third prize in its People category (Associated Press, 2016). Klaus Krippendorff (1993) presents a middle ground in his argument that reality "is *not knowable without constructive participation* by its observers" (emphasis original). Krippendorff's constructivist view responds to a cold objectivist view that denies the observer's role in affecting reality without disregarding hard material facts of protons and neutrons, of semiconductors and magnesium alloy, of skin color and denim.

This body-centered constructivist framework, detailed by Bock (2012) is particularly useful for photography since unlike writing or painting it requires the presence of a photographer at a scene with visual recognition. "Photography," she writes, "produces a tangible artifact through *interaction with the physical world*" (emphasis original).

> Objectivism insists that it is possible to detach our own experience, and engage in discourse about that experience from an external, knowable reality that is

> independent of its observers. Constructivism, on the other hand, asserts that all reality is our own reality, shared socially… and filtered through human — essentially somatic — experience.

In much the same way art critics are warned against referring to a detached "eye" in their analyses ("the eye is drawn to the highlight in Painting X…"), photojournalism critics using a body-centered constructivist paradigm should avoid referring to the photographer's "eye" as a disembodied agent, as if it worked alone to create photographs detached from the photographer's bodily and social presence. As photography (especially news photography) necessarily involves interaction with the physical world, a more satisfactory understanding of the art necessitates a paradigm that takes the whole physical experience into account. Through this framework, our view of an image moves from an incomplete, "this is the way it was," to "this is a photographer's interpretation of what he observed" — an interpretation based on optical representation that is limited or enhanced by the photographer's physical and technical constraints. For my analysis, these constraints are affected by but not limited to the items in a photographer's changing visual toolbox. It includes as many relevant physical aspects as possible: the way photographers leverage their height, body type, clothing, and even the mode of transportation that allowed the photographer to be physically present at a scene. This informs my first of two research questions:

RQ1: How do physical factors work alongside technology and economic demands to affect a photojournalist's interpretation of stories and their relationships with their subjects?

Theoretical Framework 2: A Lived Religion Approach to Photographing Religion

Of the news beats photojournalists cover, religion is perhaps one of the most sensitive at the physical level. This is not only because photojournalists must be ready to navigate unfamiliar liturgies, dress codes, and protocols, but because religious experience includes deeply intimate moments outside of religious services from birth to end of life.

The most obvious approach to religion coverage is to go to a place where religion "happens" — e.g., a church — and photograph there. Sacred spaces can provide a set of easily-recognizable iconographies to help readers establish a visual vocabulary of religion, but they are not always reliable in this function. This is especially true of American megachurches with auditorium-style sanctuaries.

While covering a Ted Cruz campaign stop at one of these auditorium-style church one Sunday in November 2015, a photographer told me he's always disappointed when he has to shoot at churches like these because they don't "look" like churches. Big Box churches like the one we were photographing tend to favor padded chairs over pews and artificial light over natural, and are designed with cost and seven-day-per-week function ranking ahead of traditional form. To a photographer like my informant, they almost feel like they're intentionally trying *not* to look like sacred spaces.

For more and more Americans, however, this is exactly what a church looks like right now, with the number of megachurches jumping from just ten to around 400 from 1970 to 1990 (Loveland, 2003). The overwhelming trend in new church construction in the U.S. has been the corporate campus model that can operate as a "third place" for church members (Foreman, 2013).

This presents a potential challenge for visual journalists who, like my informant,

want to produce images that give readers the correct sense of space; that is, a sense of religious space. This is something campaign photographers were able to achieve relatively easily in more traditional church buildings (Figure 1.4) but had more difficulty achieving in megachurches, where the concentration of light on the stage made it difficult for photographers to get wide shots that focused on congregants instead of the speakers alone (Figure 1.5).

Figure 1.4: *A screenshot of search results for "Iowa+church" during 2015 from the Getty photo archive.*

Figure 1.5: *A screenshot of search results for "Iowa+church" during 2015 from the Getty photo archive*

There are more problems with an approach to religious stories that primarily

highlights sacred spaces and sanctioned rituals: First, it assumes all religions have a "church": an equivalent sacred space that adherents visit on a certain day of the week. Second, it assumes that religious experience only or most commonly happens during explicitly religious rituals and holy days. Both of these assumptions present a narrow view of religions filtered through whichever religion the reporter is most familiar with, with roughly equivalent spaces and acts of piety.

Challenges to providing nuanced visual coverage of religion are not limited to the variety of sacred spaces available. Photographers must also face existing visual

Figure 1.6: *A photograph by Official White House Photographer Pete Souza of President Barack Obama's visit to a mosque in Baltimore, February 2016.*

vocabularies that favor a homogenous image of religious subjects. Events that photographers cover may even be framed in such a way to further establish these visual vocabularies, as seemed to be the case during a recent visit by President Obama to an American Islamic Center (Figure 1.6).

This event, Obama's first visit to an American Islamic center, was criticized by some in the Muslim community including U.K.-based journalist and blogger Nervana Mahmoud (2016) for the absence of representations of women not wearing a head covering. "The lack of non-Hijabi women among the attendees, even among the children, is striking," she wrote in a blog post. "Do all American Muslim women wear Hijab? Certainly not."

Of the photos published by the White House, there is not a single non-hijabi woman pictured, even among pre-pubescent girls who normally aren't required to wear the hijab except in more conservative traditions (Figure 1.7).

Figure 1.7: A photograph by Official White House Photographer Amanda Lucidon of President Barack Obama's visit to a mosque in Baltimore, February 2016.

Mahmoud's criticism is directed less at the White House photographers (who had no control over the event) and more at the event venue itself, which she claimed highlighted America's conservative Muslims at the expense of progressives like herself, stripping American Islam of its diversity and framing it within what she called "a monochromatic conservative style." Jayson Casper (2016), an American blogger based in Egypt, offered one explanation:

> Perhaps Obama chose to highlight such a mosque precisely because it draws such a visual image. You, too, are welcome in America. The vitriol of much political discourse targets you, and must be spoken against. Your clothing choices reflect

your faith, and for this there is freedom. We must defend it vigilantly, and publicly.

The concern from both writers is that the White House's decision to reflect current assumptions of what American Islam looks like could serve to frame future assumptions for what it *should* look like. This appears to be reinforced by the images from stock photo agencies that show up under the search "Muslim+woman" (Figure 1.8).

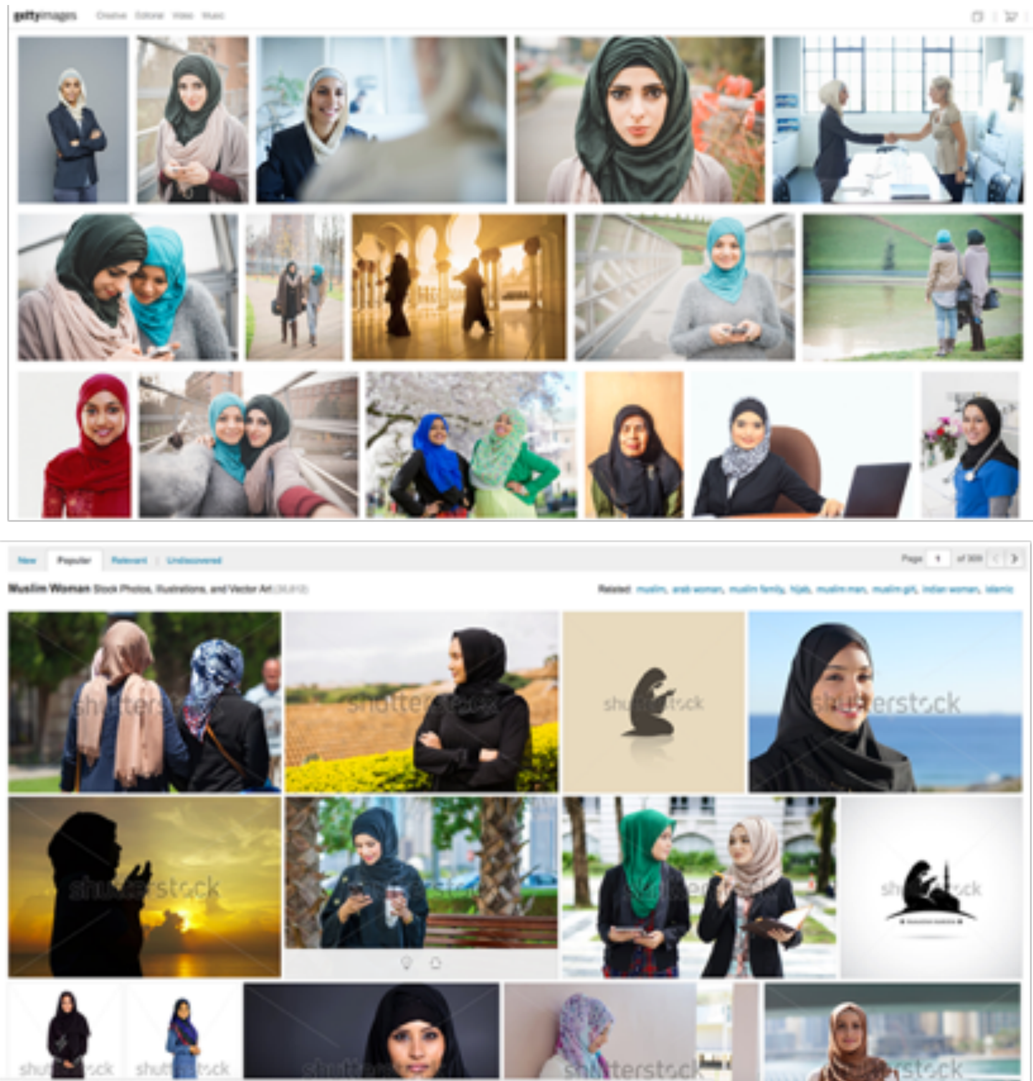

Figure 1.8: Screenshots from the first page of results under keyword search (Muslim+woman) in the stock photo archives of Getty (top) and Shutterstock (bottom).

It's not that head coverings are uncommon among Muslim women, nor that they're unempowering—it's just that they're not universal, as these stock images and the photos

from Obama's mosque visit seem to convey. Looking at these photos one can understand Mahmoud's frustration with current representations of Muslim women; the visual expectation is clearly in favor of the conservative wardrobe.

All this to say that photojournalists approaching religion stories may expect a degree of uniformity conveyed by visual vocabularies that doesn't actually translate into real life. In his study of turn of the century Catholicism in Italian Harlem, Robert Orsi (1985) found this kind of uniformity didn't exist even among fellow Catholics in the same city. For many of his informants in Italian Harlem the more established American Catholicism, with its soberer attitude toward enthusiastic expressions and strict condemnation of anything that smelled of syncretism, seemed like a different religion. By one of Orsi's definitions, in fact, it was, nearly. Orsi defined religion in two ways, starting with the more traditional definition that sought to explain the rituals, prayers, and services that characterized Catholicism as a whole. He then moved beyond the traditional definition to a more comprehensive definition of religion as "the totality of their ultimate values, their most deeply held ethical convictions, their efforts to order their reality, their cosmology." The center of this definition of religion was not the religious space but the community as a whole, the *domus*, "the center of their lives and culture" that at times merged with Roman Catholic religious practice but was much more comprehensive. It was both the religion of the Catechism and the religion of the streets, the home, and the community.

Orsi noted that this dualism was mostly for his own purposes; the Italian Catholics of Harlem themselves saw little to no distinction between the "religious" elements of their annual celebration in honor of the Madonna del Carmine and the "profane": music,

dancing in the streets, eating, and drinking. These elements often blended together, as they did at their annual *festa*. Recent scholarship suggests that this two-fold conceptualization of religion applies to other religious groups as well.

Lutgendorf (1995) found that Indian Hindus felt they were able to “sacralize” their televisions by devoting their screens to a televised version of the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* that aired every Sunday, significant given the less than orthodox status of the practice and the centrality of the television set in the home and everyday life. A similar practice was observed by Mitchell (2003) in Ireland, as Catholic television viewers were reluctant to change the channel once a short, thrice-daily devotion had begun to air, forcing them to miss the first minute of the evening TV news program. The Palestinian territories’ second radio station, TMFM, was an attempt to build community through diverse and sometimes controversial music and community news alongside Qur’an recitations at the start of each day, in what was for the stations’ founders an effortless relationship between *domus* and institutional religion (Abdelhadi, 2004).

My goal with this study is to see if such a view of religion can be applicable to visual journalism, and to what effect. For my purposes, I accept the two definitions of religion offered by Orsi but am more keen to allow breathing room in the second definition, a sort of expanding-universe definition of religion that can, given the context, include the community building rituals that work alongside or even take the place of established religion: things like sports, secular memorials, and public art. I’ve conducted visual analyses of various photojournalistic works over the last year under this framework.

RQ2: How do photojournalists visually depict religion?

RQ2a: In what ways do photojournalists capture religion through visual depictions of rituals, prayers, and services?

RQ2b: In what ways do photojournalists capture religion through visual depictions of "the totality of their ultimate values"?

Methodology

To assess my first research question (RQ1), I conducted interviews with professional photographers whose use of visual media has had a particularly noteworthy effect on their physical presence, and vice versa. In performing a body-centered analysis of these photographers' work, I've structured my interviews first with questions about their personal identity (either as a photographer, visual journalist, or something else), followed by questions about the assignments as they were given by the media outlets they worked for. I then asked about the physical and technological preparations that went into their stories and the material and physical factors that went into the shoots themselves. Questions ranged from the abstract (what were your emotions during the shoot?) to the technical (what made you decide to use a certain focal length?) to what may otherwise be considered the mundane (what kind of clothes were you wearing?).

This topic became of interest for me after my first video story was published in *The New York Times*, "A Backyard Rodeo" (2014). Before producing the video I had worked primarily as a still photographer, with next to no experience in motion production. I found that the video capabilities of my DSLR, as well as those offered by the action cameras I used to film rodeo participants from their own perspective, allowed me to tell a visual story in a completely different way. As I continued to explore video production I

also found my video rig becoming increasingly cumbersome, with additional microphones, recorders, and battery packs adding significant weight and bulk to my physical presence.

I wanted to ask other photographers about the changing definition of photojournalism and how body-consciousness affects their work. I chose a group of photographers who I felt represented the current relationships and tensions between photographers, evolving technologies, and resulting market realities. While additional questions were added based on each photographer's unique experiences, repeated responses fell into noticeable themes: flexible professional identity, reduction of physical presence with and without a camera, and strategic relationships between technology, clothing, and demeanor.

Amber Bracken, a Canadian photojournalist early in her career. Bracken recently completed a photo series using industry standard digital photography equipment and workflow to document an indigenous Catholic pilgrimage in Alberta, Canada. While using similar tools, her creative and physical approach to the pilgrimage differed from her approach to more fast-paced wire assignments, especially because of her admitted inability to blend in with her subjects (Bracken is neither indigenous nor Catholic). Her use of new, less physically restrictive strategies brought about what she called "body memories" from previous shoots as she navigated a scene.

Jessica Dimmock, a photographer turned documentary filmmaker represented by VII Photo, a nine-member photo agency that recently hosted a series of workshops for photographers transitioning from still photography to filmmaking, the VII Evolution Tour. Dimmock won awards for her still photography work shot using simple, quiet

rangefinder cameras, but has since transitioned to filmmaking, for which she uses a large shoulder-mounted camera. I attended one of her workshops in October 2015 in Chicago and interviewed her there.

David Gonzalez, a photographer, editor of *The New York Times Lens* blog, and former metro religion reporter for *The New York Times*. Gonzalez, who has produced extensive religion stories throughout his career, now uses Instagram to document the religious landscape of The Bronx. He is inspired

Mark Schierbecker, an independent journalist and student at the University of Missouri Columbia who was at the center of the media crisis during student protests in the fall of 2015. Schierbecker filmed confrontations that took place between the media and student protesters at the University of Missouri campus, which included his own conflict with former professor Melissa Click. Click requested "muscle" to remove Schierbecker from the protest area after grabbing his camera, actions for which she was eventually removed from her post. Schierbecker credits his use of a small consumer camera instead of one of his larger cameras with his being able to continuously film and gain greater access to the protests than the professional photographers around him. In fact, because of his small camera and his vague self-identification as simply, "media," Click admitted she didn't think Schierbecker was a professional journalist.

Donald Weber, a photographer, World Press Photo juror, and member of VII Photo. Weber credits his large size with giving him a greater sense of his own physicality. As a result, he has a unique shooting style that he uses as an attempt to take a less aggressive photographing stance. He also rarely upgrades his equipment, preferring

familiarity with his tools over technical advantages.

The second chapter of this study consists of visual analyses of photographers' coverage of religious issues (RQ2). I assess to what extent these photographers consider and capture the mundane and everyday in their approaches to religious subjects. I also consider what role visible piety should have in photojournalism, and ways to approach it with nuance and creativity.

I chose to highlight specific visual stories that illustrate the range of approaches to religious subjects under the two-part framework used by Orsi. For example, in her coverage of Saudi women for *National Geographic*, Lynsey Addario seems to have ignored the explicit religious practices of her subjects entirely, leaving viewers wondering if the only role religion plays in the lives of Saudi women is the institutional role imposed through modestly laws and cultural taboos. This is the opposite approach to that taken by celebrity photographer Danielle Levitt, whose series for *GQ* on a growing megachurch consists entirely of photographs taken inside the church sanctuary. Perhaps constrained to a single location by a deadline, Levitt makes up for this incomplete view of the megachurch congregation through a well-conceived portrait series highlighting the fashion of its young and hip members.

Photographer Raffaele Petralla seemed to have found a balance between these two approaches in his story on the Mari people of western Russia, whom he calls "Europe's last pagans." Petralla takes a lived religion approach to this story, focusing less on explicit religious iconographies and more on ways the Mari people's unique blend of paganism and Eastern Orthodoxy informs their everyday lives. I do criticize, however, some elements of Petralla's approach that seem to suggest an expectation of uniformity

among religions.

Last, I analyzed the work of a photographer who provided a compelling look into religious life perhaps without even meaning to. I chose to look at the work of photographer Dave Jordano. While Jordano had previously published a book on African American community churches in Chicago, *Articles of Faith*, his current work in Detroit for his ongoing series, “Detroit, Unbroken Down,” is actually more successful in its approach to religion even though religion does not appear to be his primary subject, as it was in *Articles of Faith*.

Applying a Body-Centered Approach to Lived Religion: Creative Component

Parallel to these interviews and analyses is a self-produced work of photojournalism accompanied by some reflexive notes. In combining the themes of environmentalism and religion, I produce a story on rural Catholic responses to *Laudato Si'*, the most recent encyclical from Pope Francis, which continues and builds on the ecological emphasis of Francis’ predecessor Benedict XVI. Of interest to me is a specific parish in eastern Iowa that illustrates a broader issue in American Catholicism referred to as cafeteria or communal Catholicism — that of people who identify as Catholics but disagree with or ignore established institutional teaching. St. Andrew’s Catholic Church in Blue Grass, Iowa, serves a few dozen families in Blue Grass and the surrounding rural communities. Its sacramental minister, the Rev. Bud Grant, is a professor of environmental theology at St. Ambrose University in Davenport. While Grant is vocal about the Church’s position on ecology and how it should impact farming practices, some of the agricultural producers at the parish are indifferent or skeptical of anthropomorphic climate change and their need to mitigate or adapt to its effects.

Identifying these individuals and conveying their inner tension challenges heterogeneous perceptions of religions and cultures. It also challenges the photojournalist who is tasked with illustrating an inner tension through outward visual and auditory media. I'm interested in learning from the photographers I've chosen to interview the "cost of admission" into the personal lives of these subjects and the photographer's constructive, interpretive role in the storytelling process, especially when the story seems to resist photographic representation. At issue will be not just the multiple media through which I choose to tell the story but the bodily and social practices that allow me to both gain access, tell the story accurately, and perhaps invite a level of participation from the subjects.

The foundational media of the project are still photography and video. While personal experience tells me it is necessary to concentrate on these media separately, one at a time, I look into alternative forms of visual storytelling that may allow me to incorporate moving visuals with little interference in the still photography process, and vice versa. I attended two visual journalism workshops on consecutive weekends, one with a focus on video and the other with a focus on still photography: the VII Evolution Tour, a multimedia workshop with an emphasis on the transition from still photography to videojournalism which took place in October 2015 in Chicago, and the Mountain Workshops, a weeklong still photojournalism workshop in Frankfort, Kentucky.

The finished creative component can be viewed here: https://terraproject.wordpress.com/

Chapter 2 INTERVIEWS FROM A BODY-CENTERED CONSTRUCTIVIST FRAMEWORK

I began each interview by asking the interviewee their preferred professional identity, citing some common titles like "Photographer," "Multimedia Journalist," and "Videojournalist." Each response reflected a desire for flexibility while remaining honest to one's own work. For example, Donald Weber of VII Photo simply uses the title, "Photographer" even though his work ranges well beyond still photography into video, filmmaking, and graphic illustration.

KM: What term do you use to describe yourself? Photographer? Photojournalist? Something else?

DW: Photographer.

KM: Just Photographer?

DW: Yep, just photographer.

KM: Why is that?

DW: I think it's best to be a little bit ambiguous. I don't want to tie myself to one genre, to one way of doing something. …It's time we paid more attention to the story rather than the technique. So by calling myself a photographer I can be subservient to whatever it is that I choose to do, whatever story that I choose to be told. I feel if I'm a visual journalist or a photojournalist or a documentary photographer or an artist then it already prequalifies me from a certain perspective.

While "communication and identity formation have always been intrinsic functions of photography" (Van Dijck, 2008), this concept is not always applied to the professional photographer intent on telling stories other than their own. For Weber, the main

disadvantage of the advances in digital photography technology has been a homogenization of photographic style to a specific set of tonal features available to all photographers and in demand by many clients. As a juror for the 2014 World Press Photo awards, Weber believed he could identify which programs photographers were using to edit their photos even though that information was not available, simply by identifying tonal features that were commonly reproduced with a given program. The unifying factor in all of these similar photos, he said, was speed of delivery, which also led to more dramatic, immediately compelling photographs:

> If we can have the picture immediately, what does that mean to the photographer? It means you have to go out and you have to find something that is dramatic and then send it back, as opposed to a different way to tell a story without having time as your main motivation. Time always allows you to take a step back, and I don't think we are allowed many steps back to sort of reflect upon the work we do.

Simply using the title, "Photographer" allows Weber creative space by placing him outside of the stylistic expectations he believes are associated with "Photojournalist" or "Documentary Photographer." This may have been a reason Weber never felt compelled to upgrade his equipment: until 2015 Weber shot most of his assignments with a Canon 5D, released in 2005 (Canon released two very popular and technically significant updates to the 5D over those ten years), and two lenses.

This may be a bit of a luxury as Weber is a well-known photographer with a highly respected agency. For photographers early in their careers like Amber Bracken and Mark Schierbecker, more specific terms seemed preferable. While Schierbecker is still a student and hasn't developed a firm professional identity, Bracken has been in and out of

the news industry as both a staff photographer and a full-time freelancer. She prefers the title, “Photojournalist.”

> I think I use “Photojournalist” because it is still an attempt to connect with something that’s true. I know there’s lots of conversation about the way that it’s all subjective and true objectivity is impossible, and I don’t even know if that’s what I’m trying for, but I definitely still aim for something true, whatever that means.

When Bracken worked for a newspaper, her editors tried to have her function as a MoJo Journalist, a mobile-first journalist focused on capturing content in a variety of formats (Westlund, 2013). They pictured her as having a video camera in one hand and a still camera in the other, with an audio recorder in her pocket. She attributed her strong opposition to the push for multimedia to her eventually being laid off.

“I was dying in all the important ways,” she said. “You’re doing two things worse, and most of us strive to do one thing really, really well, or the best that we possibly can, so it hurts a little bit to sacrifice that quality.”

Bracken’s style is narrower than Weber’s, with a more conventional photojournalism aesthetic that’s suitable for newsprint publications and wires. While as a staff photographer Bracken used the popular two-body setup (two camera bodies, one around each shoulder, each with a zoom lens covering the 16mm-200mm focal range) she now only uses this technique for wire assignments and sports. For her most recent project on a weeklong Catholic pilgrimage of indigenous peoples outside Alberta, Canada, Bracken used a single camera body with a small bag for lenses. Even though she felt it broke an unspoken rule of photojournalism, Bracken would often set her lens bag aside so there was nothing around her shoulders at all.

"I like to be a little bit less space than walking around with a typical photo J setup," she said. This echoed a sentiment from other photographers I interviewed, most of whom sought ways to diminish their physical presence in part through the technologies that they viewed as an extension of themselves. That the camera operates in this way was apparent from another statement from Bracken on subconscious memories associated with her camera setup.

> I covered a court job for wires this morning, and I went back to the two-body thing. I got back in my car, and there's a really specific way I kind of forgot, like a body memory, when you get down, the way you swing the lens around your leg and let it rest as you sit down so that it doesn't clank on things. I don't know, just a different awareness. That's the one thing about one-body (photography setup), I feel like I can move around a little bit more freely, a little more normally, like my body is more my body rather than a lens carrier.

Bracken's use of the term "body memory" is notable. The concept of body memory, or implicit as opposed to explicit, declarative memory, contributed greatly to Bergson's (1897) view of matter as "an aggregate of 'images,' " as neither mere representation nor a thing independent of any human perception. Body memory is "an impressive refutation of the dualism of pure consciousness and the physical body, for it cannot be attributed to either of them" (Fuchs, 2012). It diminishes the particularities of the physical body as opposed to consciousness, challenging their rigid categorizations as utterly separate from each other and instead establishing a network-based definition of the body that extends beyond flesh and blood to past and present experiences, spaces, and objects of interaction, making the body "an ensemble of organically developed

predispositions and capacities to perceive and to act" (Fuchs, 2012). For Bracken, a camera is more than a temporary extension of her body that's only relevant while it's in use; it has become integrated into her experience as a person, both past and present.

Of course this integration does not mean that the cameras photographers use are invisible to their non-photographer subjects (as one could perhaps argue about their clothes, which both photographers and non-photographers share experience with). All the photographers I interviewed expressed a desire to make themselves less noticeable in the scenes they photographed by adopting less intrusive technologies when possible. This did not apply to VII Photo photographer and filmmaker Jessica Dimmock, who previously worked as a still photographer using small and nearly silent Leica cameras and now shoots with a shoulder-mounted Canon C100 video rig for filmmaking (Figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1: *A shoulder-mounted video rig similar to that used by filmmaker Jessica Dimmock.*

Dimmock noted not only a shift in how she needed to relate to subjects with such an

imposing rig, but the rig's effect on her person, on her muscles and joints. She described the effect of prolonged use with the heavy camera setup (sometimes as much as 30 pounds on one shoulder) as making her "a linebacker in one arm" (in reality Dimmock is quite petite).

The setup not only led Dimmock to take up swimming to increase her flexibility but forced her to rethink intimacy in documentary settings. For her most recent film, "The Pearl," Dimmock hid lavalier microphones in places where she knew a subject would be nearby, allowing her to capture the sounds of muffling fabric and strained breathing as a subject changed clothes inside a car, even though she had to film most of the scene from outside the car itself; the scenes filmed inside the car were too dark and too close to make out any distinguishable figures. This creative decision required a degree of participation from the subject, which in some circles of photojournalism would be seen as flirting with the boundary between documentary and directed production. In pushing her toward becoming more of a director than a passive observer, new media helped bring Dimmock to an unprompted Herzogian moment (Ames, 2009), in which she challenged passive documentary photography's discursive claims to an exclusive relationship with reality by becoming an active participant in the scene, much as filmmakers Werner Herzog and Al Maysles did throughout their careers, Maysles most famously in his 1970 film *Gimme Shelter*, in which he filmed the reactions of Rolling Stones members to an early draft of the film.

At the opposite end of the spectrum is Mark Schierbecker, the student photographer behind the Concerned Student 1950 protest video that attracted nearly 3 million views in the months after it was published on YouTube in November 2015 (Schierbecker, 2015).

Schierbecker owns two cameras: one DSLR and one point and shoot, the tiny Canon Powershot S110 (Figure 2.2). He used the point and shoot camera on the day of the protest even though it was lower quality than the DSLR and had much poorer battery life. He grabbed it because he was late to class and had to ride his bike; he simply didn't have room for a DSLR in his bag.

Figure 2.2: The Canon Powershot S110.

This had significant implications at the protest site, and Schierbecker is convinced he would not have been able to capture the video he did if he had used one of his larger cameras. He recalled how protesters initially blocked him out when he tried to point his camera into the protest area, but ignored him once he pointed his camera toward photographer Tim Tai, who was carrying two large camera bodies with long lenses and arguing with protesters over his right to be at the scene. When Tai eventually conceded and the crowd around him dissolved, Schierbecker was left in the middle of the protest area with his camera still rolling. He had broken through the line of protesters without saying a word to them until his confrontation with former Professor Melissa Click, who famously requested "muscle" to remove him from the area.

In a later interview with CBS News, Click said she didn't think Schierbecker was a journalist (CBS News, 2016).

"He introduced himself to me only as media," Click said.

"But that's a camera, not a weapon," [CBS News correspondent Anna] Werner pointed out.

"Sure, but it also wasn't a big camera. It could have been a phone-sized camera. It wasn't — again, didn't say 'professional journalist' to me."

Schierbecker unintentionally distinguished himself as a non-TV photographer, something web videojournalists and multimedia shooters are actually quite eager to do (Bock, 2011). The combination of his consumer camera and his clothing (athletic shorts, tennis shoes, and a t-shirt), had the effect of making him seem like less of an obvious threat to people who didn't want their pictures published, until he introduced himself as a member of the media. Schierbecker managed to shoot 21 minutes of footage that day before the S110's notoriously poor battery died, but it was probably right.

Click was probably right not to recognize Schierbecker as a member of the media. He dressed like a student, appeared to be the same age as a student, and did not seek to justify his appearance by aligning himself with a title or assigning publication. None of this was intentional; Schierbecker didn't mean to disguise himself, he simply wanted to get to campus as quickly as possible. His success at blending in and infiltrating the media circle was mostly a result of his haste, not something he planned.

Despite Schierbecker's unplanned success, this was not the approach taken by the more experienced photographers I spoke with. Instead these photographers were intent on strategically announcing their roles as documentarians to the subjects they covered, with the understanding that they could only blend in so much. For example, as neither a Catholic nor an indigenous person, Amber Bracken was well aware that there was no way for her to blend in with her subjects on the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage, so she made no

attempt to do so other than camping and sometimes driving with them. Carrying a big camera in an aggressive shoulder mount position meant finding new ways of capturing candid (or not entirely candid) moments for the otherwise diminutive Jessica Dimmock. For Donald Weber, who described himself as "actually a big guy, like a linebacker," physical presence is something he has wrestled with throughout his career:

> I think my size has been an advantage because it's really made me sensitive. I think that's part of the success I have as a photographer: because I understand physicality, I understand my how my body will completely change and influence certain situations, and I think I've learned how to kind of — you'll never recede into the woodwork, but I have been able to become gray, and I have been able to sort of reduce myself in a way that's still very much present but not overpowering.

By becoming "gray," Weber is not referring to his graying hair but to physical neutrality gained through time and transparency. Weber poked fun at photographers who insist on spending days or months with their subjects before pulling out a camera in an attempt to establish a relationship. He saw this as ingenuine, as did most of the other photographers I spoke with. Their goal was not to hide their intentions but to neutralize the effect of their physical presence in a scene, first by adjusting their physical presence without a camera through plain clothes and grooming styles, then by budgeting enough time with their subjects for them to become comfortable with the idea of being photographed. While Weber used an unconventional shooting style (he said he rarely actually brought the camera to his eye, preferring to keep the viewfinder a few inches from his face to avoid an aggressive pointing gesture), photographic technique took a back seat to social technique. Or, perhaps more accurately, photographic technique *was*

social technique; as a photographer is intrinsically linked to their camera through body memory, it's impossible to separate their habits and modes of thought from photography. Even the photographer who waits months to bring out his camera around his subjects still *acts* and *sees* like a photographer.

While shooting an environmental series on the effects of the Chernobyl and Fukushima nuclear disasters on the outlying areas nearby the ground zero areas, Weber made it a point to keep his camera with him at all times, though waiting until a second invitation into a home for food before getting started with what he called "serious" shooting. This involved making a transition from a relatively static snapshot style to something more performative:

> A professional photographer needs to squat and move and stand over here and stand over there so there's — it's a performance. And you need to get them comfortable with how the performance is going to be performed. This is what I do, this is what it feels like, and at times I'll try to get as close as I can, even though I don't need to, but I do it. I just say, "Don't worry, it's not going to bite, this is what's gonna happen."

Weber could call his sharing of meals with his subjects part of this performance as well, as could Bracken, who joined in with the Lac Ste. Anne pilgrimage by sleeping outside with the pilgrims. For them, the performance of photography extends well beyond the act of photography, beyond the measurement of exposure and clicking of dials. As a medium of proximity, photography necessarily involves *presence*, the intentional act of prolonged proximity to subjects that neutralizes the "otherness" both of the photographer to the subject *and* of the subject to the photographer.

Chapter 3 VISUAL ANALYSES OF LIVED RELIGION

With these interviews in mind I wanted to see how a body-centered constructivist framework could inform my ongoing criticism of depictions of religious topics in photojournalism. The following is a series of original visual analyses of photographers' work, excerpts from which were published on my personal website and companion blog Medium Vantage (McGinnis, 2016).

Visual Analysis #1: "The Changing Face of Saudi Women." Photographs by Lynsey Addario for *National Geographic,* January 2016.

When Lynsey Addario landed in Saudi Arabia to photograph Saudi women for *National Geographic*, she may have already considered two dilemmas facing her:

- What can I add to the visual conversation on women in Saudi Arabia that hasn't already been covered in existing work like Olivia Arthur's *Jeddah Diary*?
- How do I address the elephant in the room — religion — namely, the interpretation of Islam and Islamic law that is behind everything that makes the lives of Saudi women distinct from other women in the Arab world — without coming across too strong?

Addario answered the first question by bringing a new level of vibrancy and color to a people who have otherwise been portrayed as quiet and subdued (Figure 3.1). Addario's Saudi women put on fashion shows, go off-roading in the desert, blast American hip-hop, and teach kickboxing classes. Where Olivia Arthur was able to capture powerful, quiet moments, Addario brought to her story a much-needed level of energy.

Addario depicts her subjects with a sense of breezy informality: snapping pictures

Figure 3.1: A photograph by Lynsey Addario in the January 2016 edition of National Geographic.

with their phones, digging through their purses while their children tumble over each other (Figure 3.2, Figure 3.3). Mirroring a major focus of the written text on head and body coverings, Addario extends this sense of informality to the way Saudi women wear the abaya and niqab, the coverings that are culturally mandated for women in Saudi Arabia. In the photographs in which her subjects are even wearing a covering, they seem to be unraveling, hanging loosely at the ends, exposing hair in the front and back, embroidered with shiny designs. Addario shows her viewers there is a degree of play in how Saudi women handle their dress obligations, and by extension their religion.

Noticeable in Addario's edit is the absence of personal religious moments; her subjects appear to observe few if any distinctively Islamic practices on camera: no prayers, no Islamic rituals, no socializing at the mosque. Addario and her editors instead

Figure 3.2: A photograph of women on a picnic in Saudi Arabia by Lynsey Addario in the January 2016 edition of National Geographic.

Figure 3.3: A photograph of women having lunch in Saudi Arabia by Lynsey Addario in the January 2016 edition of National Geographic.

focus on scenes from everyday life that illustrate the influence of the House of Saud's quasi-religious institutions over individual religious experiences. This seemed to echo her approach to Afghani women in her series *Veiled Rebellion* (2013).

There is only one challenge to Addario's lived religion take on Saudi women, and it comes out in the written text's focus on "modernization," a risky term that comes up periodically. While author Cynthia Gorney and her editors are careful not to imply that "modernization" actually means something like "westernization" or "de-orientalizing," it's important to clarify that it doesn't necessarily mean "secularization" either. It might have that connotation outside of Saudi Arabia, but it probably does not for most Saudis. For this reason, it may be helpful to see more strictly Islamic observances because they help clarify that there is more to Saudi religion than wearing the abaya and the niqab; these photos may be able to further demonstrate how submission to God informs one's identity as both a Saudi and a woman. This involves the difficult task of confronting and transcending the generic depictions of Islamic piety that are already overdone, but it doesn't mean going out of one's way to avoid religion altogether.

It's also possible, given the characters in the text, that the subjects themselves didn't want to be portrayed as stereotypically religious and therefore self-censored their religious practices while they were around Addario. That makes it even more important to accept the challenge to publish more authentic and nuanced images of religious observance that add new layers of depth to the visual index of religion.

Visual Analysis #2: "Detroit, Unbroken Down." Photographs by Dave Jordano, 2011-2015.

When *The New Yorker* featured Dave Jordano's work in 2009, he had just finished his book, *Articles of Faith: African-American Community Churches in Chicago* (Figure 3.4), a straightforward visual index of sacred spaces that was big on color and limited in scope (Honey, 2009). It was the sort of project a photographer might create if he were asked to produce a religion series from scratch: the first logical move would be to find the places where religion happens: a church.

Figure 3.4: *A photograph by Dave Jordano from* Articles of Faith: African-American Community Churches in Chicago *(2009).*

Jordano has since switched his focus from Chicago to Detroit, and in doing so he seems to have discovered that most religion actually happens outside the church. One of

the best features of Jordano's ongoing series, "Detroit, Unbroken Down" is his fresh approach to religion that recognizes faith practice in its everyday forms, carried out not only outside of church buildings but even outside of defined religious structures and institutions.

"Detroit, Unbroken Down" is more complete than *Articles of Faith* because it explores religion as it is commonly experienced, even when those experiences fall outside of what we would normally consider religious. Take roadside memorials, for example (Figure 3.5).

Figure 3.5: A photograph of a roadside memorial in Detroit by Dave Jordano in "Detroit, Unbroken Down" (2014).

In Detroit, lives lost to street violence and other tragedies are often commemorated with toys, balloons, and teddy bears that scale nearby street lights and utility poles. Though spontaneous and fitting into no codified orthodoxy, these secular memorials are as much a part of the public mourning ritual as prayerful funerals and burials. The memorials rot and fade over time, but the Detroit municipality is reluctant to remove them because they designate sacred spaces (Flagg, 2013). And while Flagg insists that roadside memorials are better described as "ritualized performance" than religion because they omit religious imagery

like crosses, they are still as much a part of the conversation on the role of religion in Detroit life as *Articles of Faith* was in Chicago. It's a complex conversation that Jordano is attuned to through the sheer amount of time he has spent in Detroit, a conversation most photographers simply wouldn't be able to engage.

Jordano's photos look beyond both physical church buildings and familiar religious iconographies into the community-building rituals and practices among Detroit residents that work alongside or even take the place of established religion (Orsi, 2010). This expanded definition of religion recognizes the little syncretisms—blends of religion and local culture that flirt with the edges of orthodoxy—that make Detroit religion distinctive. These overlaps are where most religion really happens: in the vague cosmological references that have more purchase on the street than in seminaries, in the vernacular of everyday life whose biblical origins are long forgotten.

Figure 3.6: *A photograph by Dave Jordano from "Detroit, Unbroken Down" (2011).*

Among these syncretisms are those found in “Dee’s Dresser, Southwest Side, Detroit 2011” (Figure 3.7). This is the kind of image that deserves a large print because it tells so much of what’s important to Dee: girls, music, family, humor (the high school diploma in the upper right corner is an ironic fake), through objects and images that line Dee’s wall like little icons. Among all of these artifacts, buried between a stereo, two decks of playing cards and a crushed soda can, is a leather-bound Nelson Study Bible.

Figure 3.7: “Dee’s Dresser,” a photograph by Dave Jordano from “Detroit, Unbroken Down” (2011).

Of course churches are still an important part of the vocabulary of religious life in Detroit, and Jordano continues to produce work there. But “Detroit, Unbroken Down” illustrates that great visual storytelling about a complex and all-encompassing topic like religion necessarily stems from intimacy with one’s subjects, not previous expectations

for what should qualify as religion. For Jordano, religion was unavoidable. By refusing to locate it only within church walls, he gives Detroit a fair and holistic representation.

Visual Analysis #3: "What Would Cool Jesus Do?" Photographs and Video by Danielle Levitt for *GQ*, December 2015.

The text that accompanies Danielle Levitt's photos and video, by reporter Taffy Brodesser-Akner, is a personal story, one that focuses most of its initial effort on exploring the humanity of Justin Bieber, baptized in another celebrity's bathtub by a pastor in Saint Laurent. The rest of this several thousand-word story is an autobiographic exploration of Brodesser-Akner's own struggles with faith framed by a church that, like the story itself, oozes with sincerity, self-reflection, and self-conscious style.

At first, it looks like Levitt is going to cover this story by repeating some of the same basic shots common to stories about American megachurches (Figure 3.8): anonymous hands in the air silhouetted by colorful lights, a wide shot with more hands in the air, a medium shot with closed eyes and more hands in the air.

Figure 3.8: *Left: A photograph by Danielle Levitt from "What Would Cool Jesus Do?" GQ, December 2015. Right: A photograph by George Etheredge for The New York Times, February 2016.*

These are the kinds of shots *New York Times* Lens blog editor and longtime religion photojournalist David Gonzalez has described as the most tired clichés among

photojournalists covering evangelicalism and Pentecostalism (D. Gonzalez, personal communication, March 26, 2016).

However, in what ends up being the visual cornerstone of the piece, Levitt shifts from typical megachurch coverage by providing some actual faces through a well-conceived portrait series of Hillsong NYC attendees (Figure 3.9).

Figure 3.9: Portraits by Danielle Levitt from "What Would Cool Jesus Do?" GQ*, December 2015.*

The dense gallery delivers everything readers need to know about these stylish Christians without shouting, "stylish Christians." By depicting other expressions besides

worshipful reverence and awe, Levitt's portraits show that there is more to the personalities in this congregation than naive passion. She conveys that the average reader might actually have something in common with these people.

What sticks out right away is the upper left frame in Figure 3.9. Like most of the parishioners in this series the subject is dressed in greyscale with an emphasis on black; her leather jacket melts into the background, just as it does into the deep blacks of the Hillsong worship space. Like a concert, Hillsong NYC is a sea of floating heads in bright greens and oranges from the punctuating bright lights. Levitt gives her subjects a better color balance, but the concept is the same. As Hillsong pastor Carl Lentz said in Levitt's video: "The worse this city is, the better it is for us. The darker a room, the brighter a flashlight." The spotlights at Hillsong are never on the architecture, they're always on people.

There is so much diversity and character in these portraits that one may be tempted to forget that evangelicals are supposed to be homogenous. There is so little care for explicitly religious symbolism (except for the denim Jesus jacket in frame #2, which is probably being worn ironically anyway), that readers can recognize these subjects as real people with real lives outside of church. Just like them, some of the subjects exude confidence while others seem to express a bit of insecurity in front of the camera.

Levitt had the additional challenge of producing an accompanying video feature following a day in the life of Hillsong pastor Carl Lentz. This video is mostly successful despite some technical flaws: poor quality interview audio (Levitt appeared not to be using a lavalier or boom microphone), and bad color banding in low light (where most of the church activities took place). Its greatest contribution to the story, however, was

bringing viewers outside the church, into the pastor's home and alongside him in his daily tasks: riding elevators, taking cabs, etc. Lentz is still a unique figure, a celebrity, but Levitt's access and hand-held, imperfect style grounds him for viewers, making him relatable.

Levitt, along with her director of photography's generous edit, does everything she can to break from the caricatures that may be associated with a story like this. Better than any silhouette atmospheric shot, her portraits and video give the spirit of Brodesser-Akner's story: that of a group of people who want to look cool yet who at the same time are desperate for authenticity. This is a tension anyone can relate to, which means this isn't a portrait series, or a story, about religious people. It's just about people.

Visual Analysis #4: "Mari People, A Pagan Beauty." Photographs by Raffaele Petralla, 2015.

For some journalists, including visual journalists, it's hard to escape the fact that the features they might associate with religion—features like clergy, sabbath, and place of worship—are often categorizations imposed from the outside that those in non-western religions may not use to identify themselves. A reporter looking to find the Sikh "version" of a priest, sabbath, or church will find none of the above, only highlighting their western or Abrahamic-centric understanding of religion. Raffaele Petralla's most recent work on the Mari nations in Russia provides a more nuanced exploration of a complex people with this in mind.

The Mari, who number about 600,000 and live 500 miles east of Moscow, are referred to by Petralla as "the last pagan population in the West" (a qualification that may be discounting the recent resurgence of Odinism taking place in Scandinavia). Petralla

brings to light a kind of religion that refuses to fit into the commonly accepted boundaries for what a religion "should" be, even (especially) as he explores the Mari's overlapping observance of Eastern Orthodox Christian practices alongside their pagan roots.

Petralla opens his series with an image of Mari people attending a small concert in the grass (figure 3.10). Four musicians stand on stage under a horizontal line that divides the image in half. A Mari farmscape and homestead stretches into the background while

Figure 3.10: *A photograph by Raffaele Petralla in "Mari People, a Pagan Beauty." 2010.*

patchy grass and weeds make up the foreground. It's overcast and the colors are desaturated just so. It's the kind of laid back performance that looks like anyone in the audience could just jump on stage at any moment—but most seem like they're just there to sit and socialize.

This image sets the tone for a story that, while important, doesn't seem to take itself

too seriously. The series is not poverty porn, and it's not even really that much about the loss of a way of life. It's about people eating, driving, cooking, smoking cigarettes, bathing, and yes, taking part in a few religious ceremonies and rituals. But in most of these images Petralla refuses to place the religious life of the Mari into a separate category from the everyday.

Figure 3.11 is a notable example. A young girl in all pink runs out of frame while an older woman drinks from a beer bottle that takes two hands to hold. The photo is

Figure 3.11: A photograph by Raffaele Petralla in "Mari People, a Pagan Beauty." 2010.

effortless in its approach to its themes: aging, in that the visual divide is clear but both subjects seem youthful; and religion, in that the girl's head covering goes almost unnoticed in the energy of the image. Like her religion, her head covering is integrated into the wider story, not a separate theme that's artificially located in a different category from everyday life.

In its approach to both Mari paganism and Eastern Orthodoxy, Petralla's series is neither afraid of religious representations nor a sideways look into the customs of an exotic, ancient tribe. It doesn't "other" the religious in their practice, making them unrelatable.

Figure 3.12: A photograph by Raffaele Petralla in "Mari People, a Pagan Beauty." 2014.

Figure 3.12 starts to strafe into this territory slightly: a picture with this little energy or sense of place may not have been included in the edit if the women weren't wearing exotic ceremonial clothes.

Similarly, a headshot of a of Mari spiritual leader (not shown here) feels a bit out of place. Why do we need to see him? Is he the Mari equivalent of a priest? Do the Mari even have the equivalent of a priest? If not, might Petralla or his editor be imposing his own categories of religion on the Mari by trying to find an equivalent that's not there?

Petralla is at his most compelling when he's letting the spiritual come naturally—as in his frame of two thin girls scarfing down watermelon slices the size of their heads (Figure 3.13). Like the story itself, the frame balances intensity (at first it seems the girls are tearing into big chunks of red meat) with a peace that stretches into the landscape. It's a restless quiet, and it matches perfectly the tone of life in Mari Russia that Petralla is eager to convey.

Petralla recognizes an expanded visual definition of lived religion that conveys a

more nuanced understanding of what religion is to its adherents. What allowed photographers like Petralla, Dave Jordano, and Danielle Levitt to engage in lived religion, which is exceptionally complex, is exactly what allowed Amber Bracken, Donald Weber, and Jessica Dimmock to engage in the complexity of their given subjects: *presence*. In -and-out photojournalism, either on the campaign trail or at an organized mosque visit, will often keep photojournalists from achieving real intimacy with their subjects. Photojournalists who want to see what happens below the surface in their religious subjects' lives, who want to capture religion through both identifiable and unidentifiable practice, don't need to disguise themselves or use elaborate tactics: their greatest assets are time and proximity.

Figure 3.13: *A photograph by Raffaele Petralla in "Mari People, a Pagan Beauty." 2010.*

REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS ON CREATIVE COMPONENT

Over the course of two semesters I began my own project with religious and environmental themes on a single Catholic parish in northeast Iowa whose sacramental minister is an advocate for environmental restoration and a professor of environmental ecology. The progress of this project, tentatively titled, "Terra," is included along with this study, and can also be found here: https://terraproject.wordpress.com/

Somewhat against the advice of Donald Weber and David Gonzalez during my interviews with them, as well as from instructors at the 2015 Mountain Workshops, which I attended in October 2015, the nature of my research meant that I needed to allow the media I used to dictate the scope and style of the project. I did so to see if the interaction between a medium and my own body would affect my view into the lived religion of my subjects. Would using a silent camera disarm subjects or raise suspicions about not knowing when they were actually being photographed? Would it give me more confidence in my ability to blend in? Would a large video camera on a tripod or crane have the opposite effect? Would looking into an angle viewfinder or flip screen result in a periscope effect, leading to more natural interactions?

On subsequent shoots I used separate visual media including a Canon C100 video camera similar to the one used by Jessica Dimmock, a Hasselblad medium format film camera similar to that used by Olivia Arthur, a point-and-shoot similar to the one used by Mark Schierbecker, a camera with a 360-degree angle of view, and a standard DSLR in both single-body and double-body configurations. I also paid close attention to my physical presence through the clothing and accessories I chose to wear to my shoots, each of which took place over the course of less than one day.

After the first Mass I attended at the host church, one of the parishioners mistook me for a college student returning for a visit. I hadn't brought a camera and I dressed as I normally do, in blue jeans, a button-up shirt, leather boots, and glasses. I immediately realized that even as a non-Catholic it wasn't particularly difficult for me to blend in to the mostly white, middle class congregation. The bigger obstacle turned out to be convincing my subjects that I wasn't a young, outsider environmentalist looking to produce a hit piece on their agricultural practices.

The opening video series for "Terra" is an illustrative interview with Grant for which I used my most intrusive photography equipment and paid the least attention to my physical appearance. This was because an illustration, as opposed to hard documentary, can offer the most space between the photographer and the subject, requiring as little as an unrecorded interview. This is how videojournalists like *The New York Times*' Leslye Davis (2014) are able to produce stories on sensitive topics like peoples' private internet passwords.

After finishing the illustrative piece, I made a point not to visit the church again until the end of the project. This was to challenge myself to look for examples of lived religion among my subjects and not to fall back on religious iconographies. This turned out to be a mistake. Despite being able to articulate Catholic concepts gained through study, which had helped me gain access to the priest, the absence of my physical presence at the parishioners' shared space created a barrier between us; subjects' trust in my intentions increased as I began to attend more Masses and programming events at the church, eventually leading to unsolicited invitations into homes I had sought unsuccessfully by phone or email for months prior. I believe this was the "becoming

gray" the Donald Weber talked about in my interview with him.

In the case of this story popular religion was the entryway into lived religion. Even though a home or farm can be just as sacred a space as a church in an Orsian sense of lived religion, and even though my subjects seemed to have an understanding of this idea already, the church building remained a large part of my subjects' religious vocabulary and my presence was needed there to gain access into the rest of their lives if I wanted to produce a distinctly religious story.

The media I used for storytelling purposes played a surprisingly minor role in gaining access to the lived religion of my subjects, but with a few predictable results. Angle finders, even on large cameras, did have the effect of disarming subjects, even in church and during church ceremonies. Novelty cameras like the Hasselblad (an antique film camera), Ricoh GRII (a very small point-and-shoot digital camera), and the 360-degree camera also had a disarming effect.

The only clothing my subjects seemed to notice or point out were my shoes. Tennis shoes were limiting both because they weren't good in mud on the farm and because they drew comments from my subjects almost immediately on multiple occasions. Heavy work boots went unnoticed.

An interesting development in my exploration into methods of reducing or increasing proximity to subjects came with the release of a virtual reality documentary feature from *The New York Times* called "The Displaced" (2015). This was the first time I had seen immersive media applied outside of the gaming world, and it raised some key questions about photographer anonymity and subject direction. The filmmakers of "The Displaced" are almost never present on screen, instead placing the camera in the middle

of a room and walking out of sight as it records. They also gave a degree of direction to their subjects, asking them to walk up to the camera in a portrait-like stance.

This challenged me to create my own 360-degree feature to experience what effect having a physical body has on this kind of photography. Despite a conviction that my physical presence in the view of the camera wouldn't make much of a difference in the audience's interpretation of a scene, I always retreated out of view of the camera, almost as if by body memory. I do the same sort of thing when I'm on an assignment with multiple photographers, being careful not to enter their field of view and spoiling their frames, even if I am a legitimate participant in the event taking place as a member of the media.

By testing the camera in fields and unpopulated areas, I found that 360-degree video is particularly successful at conveying a sense of emptiness or desolation. I used this to my advantage to tell a story about an abandoned church, and I borrowed poorly-recorded audio from a previous Mass held at the church to simulate memory artifact. I did the same at the farm of a now-retired farmer, to give a sense both of the expansiveness of his fields and the emptiness of his cattle pasture.

While this project has potential, it has so far been unsuccessful in achieving the kind of intimacy with subjects that will be necessary to bring it from an illustrative or conceptual piece on the importance of ecology for Catholic theologians after *Laudato Si'* to an enlightening look into the lives of everyday rural Catholics struggling to come to terms with the implications of the Pope's environmental focus on their current personal and agricultural practices. My access has improved in recent months, however, with multiple invitations to travel and shoot with subjects without my asking. This points out a

factor I hadn't considered in tools to successfully approach lived religion: time. Years of groundwork have allowed Dave Jordano to develop a nuanced view into religious life in Detroit. The same was true of Jessica Dimmock, who despite carrying an unwieldy camera setup captured moments at many levels deeper than what can be captured on most day-to-day assignments. Amber Bracken had similar success by traveling and living with her subjects on their pilgrimage, making herself a part of their lives while embracing her status as an outsider. It turns out the key into religion beneath the surface is not a limiting of one's physical presence in the style of Mark Schierbecker, but the increase in physical presence over time. Aa medium of proximity, photography is by nature incarnational, a concept of importance to several religions. It is only appropriate that presence is the key to a photojournalist's approach to lived religion.

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