Abstracts

**Krystol Smith. Paul Carus: A Religious Parliament Incarnate**

As I have been most intrigued by the study of Buddhism within my time as a Religious Studies major, I have chosen to research, Paul Carus, one of the most influential figures in the history of Buddhism's spread to America. In a letter written to the fierce Buddhist advocate, Angarika Dharmapala, Paul Carus claimed that he did not have a single belief system, but rather that he was a "religious parliament incarnate". The World's Parliament of Religions held in Chicago in 1893 was certainly the most influential event in Carus' life leading to his dedication to the dissemination of his ideal universal religion centered on science. Therefore, it is this parliament which we must turn to in order to explain Carus' self-identification as one who embodies a religious parliament. Carus did not believe that any one religion was sufficient to stand on its own; rather, he followed many traditions as a sympathizer to each. He was not the only advocate of a universal religion based on science as he described in his speech at the Parliament, but he quickly became one of the most influential activists in promoting this belief system, especially through his work with his *The Gospel of Buddha*, which he wrote and published within a year of the Parliament. My paper examines at Carus' role as a "religious parliament incarnate" through exploring his involvement with some of the most influential events and people of this time in which Buddhism was making a more salient appearance in America.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Mark Elmore

**Paula Reves. Childless Hope: Examining Assisted Reproductive Technologies in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism**

This project is a Religious Studies and Bioethics paper examining assisted reproductive technologies in Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. The commandment, “be fruitful and multiply” is very important to Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. As it is a prescribed commandment from the Torah, the inability to procreate can be seen as embarrassing or shameful among married couples in the community. This paper addresses the permissibility of artificial insemination, in vitro fertilization, and surrogacy among Ultra-Orthodox Jews. It also, on a larger level, examines how Ultra-Orthodox Judaism engages with modern medical technologies. It uses case studies and contemporary rabbinic opinion to work through the different reproductive technology and the challenges that it poses. It is important to acknowledge that many of the assisted reproductive technologies come with challenges and restrictions. The issue is further complicated when examining egg storage and donation, an important aspect of assisted reproductive technologies. With the growing biotechnologies available, some of them may be at odds with traditionalist religious communities, such as Ultra-Orthodox Judaism. This project has significance for examining how traditionalist communities adapt to modern technologies.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Meaghan O'Keefe

**Samuel Rothmann. The Protestant Reformation: The Development of Individualism and Americanism**

Individualism is one of the premier features of Western culture, especially in the United States, where individualism has been taken to extremes by Tea Party and Libertarian philosophies with their emphasis on the individual at the expense of communal ways of thinking. A key factor in the development of individualism was the Protestant Reformation, but this has not been sufficiently stressed in most discussions of individualism. The purpose of this paper is to rectify this inadequacy by explaining how key factors during the Protestant Reformation, such as the Protestant doctrine of the “Priesthood of all Believers” and the notion that every individual should read the biblical text, were essential for the development of individualism. Martin Luther ignited a revolution that undermined the
institutional foundations of the Catholic Church and fostered entirely new ways of thinking about individual rights and responsibilities. These ideas have had a profound influence on shaping the Western, notably, American character.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Allison Coudert

Kaleena Bergfors: Blurred Vision: Redefining Ethics and Meaning in Times of Cultural Crisis

On 17 March, 2009 the creators and cast of Battlestar Galactica were invited to speak at the United Nations Department of Public Information to raise awareness and public profile of humanitarian concern. In times of cultural devastation, humanity is faced with tough moral choices in their fight for survival, and this series grapples with those morally grey areas, challenging our concepts of justice, faith, and humanity – and as Admiral Adama says “it is not enough to survive, one has to be worthy of surviving.” In conducting a close textual analysis of the series, this paper explores ethics and morality present in a multitude of ways, drawing from philosophical theory as well as history, resulting in a more well-rounded analysis of the human condition. This television series causes viewers to reflect on not only the show’s implicit values but our own society’s; these questions of humanity and survival are vital for us to evaluate, so that we may improve society just as the creators of the series set out to do when they spoke at the UN. Battlestar Galactica is no futuristic fantasy; it is a biting critique of the self-destructive drives at the heart of modern, contemporary culture.

Thesis Supervisor: Mark Elmore

Mitchell Winter. On Cloth and Collections: Towards a Typology of 19th Century Indian Trade Labels

This project examines the emerging pictorial tradition of cotton cloth trade labels and their trajectories into the socioeconomic domain of 19th and early 20th century colonial India. I focus on a collection of 38 trade labels that showcase different styles, dimensions and visual contents from disparate centers of production. Trade labels present in colonial India came via the cloth trade between Britain and India: cotton from India was shipped to Britain, manufactured into cloth and sent back to India to sell. In the process, European traders began to design and produce exceedingly intricate labels for the cloth they meant to sell in the Indian colonies. The resulting trade labels, a type of image circulating at the time, became popular with the Indian consumer public as objects of fascination and, as I suggest, devotion. Moreover, the European preoccupation with reproducing certain images of Indian public life in trade labels is discernible and marks the cross-fertilizing exchange that activated during moments of the colonial encounter. This paper engages contemporary sources on visual theory in India, histories of religion and the politics of heritage.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Archana Venkatesan
Mariane Glaser. *Neurotheology: This is Your Brain on God*

Religious ideas are continually constructed and reconstructed in dynamic fluctuation with contemporary sensibilities and prevailing attitudes. Religious traditions claim to have access to fundamental truths, when it may just be a generation’s attempt to find truth in their sociopolitical reality. Religious views infiltrate daily life and permeate thought processes. Ancient shamanism evidences biological underpinnings for religious ideas, and following this stream of thought, the current generation has chosen the authority of science to sort authenticity from falsehood and established truth. Even though modern brain imaging technology claims to have discovered correlations between objective neurochemistry and subjective religious experience, is this ample evidence to prove or disprove anything for certain in a highly complex system of neural networks? Philosophical frameworks explore the physical and metaphysical functions of the pineal gland while scientific discourse examines the immense conceptual and methodological challenges brain localization research encounters. Neurotheology aims to re-imagine and redefine religious experience through an organic basis: the human brain.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Naomi Janowitz

Francisco Ortega. *Representation and its Discontents: Shirin Neshat and the Women of Allah*

This paper uses Shirin Neshat’s photographic series entitled *Women of Allah* as a case study to critically examine contemporary conventions of representation. Although Shirin Neshat is trying to go beyond the normalized characterization of the stereotypical Muslim, Middle Eastern, Woman, her artwork also makes evident the limits of what can be said to be, or depicted to be, a Muslim, Middle Eastern, Woman. Foucault was used to analyze the formal elements integrated into each photograph and the photograph’s resulting representational qualities due to these formal choices. O’Doherty was used to discuss both the ideology of the gallery spaces in which these photographs are exhibited and the problem of context which is both negated and replaced in such spaces. Although Shirin Neshat’s work has been said to impart positive contributions in western spheres, this analysis reveals that her work is actually functioning on a much higher level of complexity, ultimately directing our attention to the unstable nature of representation and the fact-producing quality of art.

Thesis Supervisor: Prof. Naomi Janowitz