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Immersion as shared imperative: entertainment of/in digital scholarship

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ABSTRACT

The modern culture of entertainment is performed across diverse practices and institutions – from Disney to gaming, Hollywood to tourism, museums to commercial consumption – and it prizes being physically and affectively ‘caught up’ in forms of play that transport participants away from everyday reality. Defined in immersive terms, entertainment is pervasive and ideologically compelling. This article explores an analogous relationship between this ubiquitous culture of entertainment and digital scholarship in the critical study of religion. The central case study is an ethnographic and archival project, *Materializing the Bible*, which examines the social life of scriptures, religious tourism, and processes of material religion. I argue that immersion is a shared imperative between this project of digital scholarship and the empirical phenomenon it seeks to understand. As a contribution to this special issue, the article illustrates how the affordances of working with a digital platform intersect with a theoretical commitment to better understand the relationship between religion and entertainment.

KEYWORDS

Digital scholarship; anthropology; social life of scriptures; material religion; tourism; pilgrimage

Introduction

‘For its effect on contemporary human life and especially for its sheer exotic weirdness, the culture of entertainment is arguably the most influential ideological system on the planet’ (Stromberg 2009, 3). This provocation comes from the anthropologist Peter Stromberg and his analysis of how modern entertainment shapes modern subjectivity. By ‘entertainment,’ Stromberg does not mean a bounded social field of leisure or fun. Rather, entertainment is defined as a particular species of play: a practice that allows consumers to become physically and affectively ‘caught up’ in activities that transport them away from everyday reality. In short, entertainment is about creating and participating in immersive environments.¹

Understood as immersion, entertainment is pervasive in late modern life. Its power is evident in the effects it exerts on our bodies and habits, such as what forms of activity we find compelling, preferable, enjoyable, and viscerally memorable. But, the power of

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¹As a terminological note, I am not equating ‘immersion’ and ‘play,’ but observing that immersion is a particular variety of ludic experience. Not all forms of play are immersive, but immersion always engages our capacity to play. With Stromberg (2009), my understanding of play is indebted to Huizinga’s early conceptualization of play as pleasurable, voluntary, and distinct from the flow of everyday life (1949).

entertainment also extends to its colonizing effect on other institutions. Immersive entertainment is not just dominant compared to other cultural forms; its techniques and values have infused other cultural forms.

As Darwin argued for the survival of the fittest, we now have survival of the most entertaining ... The entertaining politician gets elected, the entertaining class gets the enrollment, the entertaining car is the one that sells, and over time a competition emerges to enhance entertainment value wherever possible. (Stromberg 2009, 8)

The ways in which an immersive imperative provides symbolic capital is evident in cases ranging from urban planning (Hannigan 1998) to restaurant dining (Grazian 2008), historical re-enactment (Agnew 2007), museums (Linenthal 1995), tourism (Magelssen 2014), and producing ethics of care in global consciousness-raising.²

Fields of religious practice are not exempt from the power of entertainment, which may be especially predictable given the longstanding relationship between religion and play. Religious rituals, for example, are often designed as spaces where adherents can exist within their religious worlds (Huizinga 1949; Turner 1974). Special locations, buildings, clothes, objects, music, and language all work as techniques to immerse adherents into a sacred space-time. Further, religion and play are both processes of world creation, equipping adherents/players with guiding interpretive schemas for meaning-making (Laycock 2015). Given these affinities, it is no surprise that religious actors have mobilized immersive play occur across diverse media and technology: from physical toys such as board games and action figures (Bado-Fralick and Norris 2010) to films such as *The Passion of the Christ* (Plate 2008), digital gaming (Gonzalez 2014), formation of online communities (Campbell 2012), mobile and social media applications (Wagner 2012), stage theatre such as Passion Play and Hell House performances (Pelligrini 2007) and the art of illusion, as with evangelical Protestant 'Gospel' magicians (Jones 2012).

Mobilizing immersive play may be especially resonant for religion in late modernity. For example, scholarship on U.S. evangelicalism has observed that immersive play can be the source of both moral panic and spiritual edification. Laycock (2015) illustrated how fundamentalists in the 1980s condemned the role-playing franchise *Dungeons and Dragons* on the grounds that its seductive play would spiritually corrupt unsuspecting youth. To the other extreme, anthropologist Luhrmann (2012) has argued that the 'as-if imagination' has become a vital resource among U.S. charismatics. They cultivate 'a deliberately playful, imaginative, fantasy-filled experience of God' in response to the condition of living amid a pluralistic society in which multiple worldviews are legitimized (372). In Wagner's (2012) comparative study of religion and virtual worlds, she argues that world-building is definitional for both domains and therefore helps explain why digital media plays hosts to so much religious innovation in our technological age.

This article extends the analysis of religion and entertainment by exploring an analogous relationship between religious tourist attractions that materialize biblical texts and digital scholarship that seeks to understand this religious phenomenon. I argue that immersive play is an imperative that is shared between a digital project and the empirical phenomenon that it analyzes. Both capitalize on the cultural resonance of immersion to

²For this latter example, see cases such as crafting refugee simulations and 'The Compassion Experience,' a touring immersive exhibit designed by Compassion International (Hillary Kaell, email communication, November 2016).

pursue their respective ends. As a contribution to this special issue – which highlights the value of digital scholarship for the critical, comparative, interdisciplinary study of religion – the article illustrates how the affordances of working with a digital platform intersect with a theoretical commitment to better understand the relationship between religion and entertainment.

Materializing the Bible

Launched in July 2015, *Materializing the Bible* is a digital scholarship project dedicated to understanding how religious actors create places that transform the written words of scripture into physical, experiential, and choreographed environments.³ Built on a popular website design platform, the project is multi-functional. It is curatorial, cataloging more than 450 attractions around the world that materialize the Bible. It shares ethnographic and archival data, aiming to foster methodological transparency and experiment with mixed-media strategies of representation. And, it is designed for pedagogical use, providing resources for students in the anthropology of religion to engage questions of theory and method.

Materializing the Bible aims to advance three primary areas of comparative inquiry. First, the project is grounded in the social life of scriptures framework, which seeks to understand how ‘scripture’ – broadly conceived as a cultural category – is used by communities of practice to reflect and re-create identity, values, and claims to public legitimacy (e.g., Bielo 2009). Second, the project focuses on a particular form of religious practice, which is creating places designed as visitor destinations. Attractions that materialize the Bible self-identify using known categories such as ‘theme park,’ ‘museum,’ and ‘garden.’ In turn, the project engages questions of theory and method in the anthropology of religious tourism and pilgrimage (e.g., Badone and Roseman 2004). Third, this project contributes to the field of material religion (e.g., Promey 2014), by illustrating how the social life of scriptures and religious place-making are grounded in processes of embodiment, sensation, and materiality.

Materializing the Bible focuses curation in five areas. (1) Each attraction is identified, described, and hyperlinked to either an official webpage or web address that provides a substantial overview. Attractions are organized into four categories – re-creations, gardens, creation museums, and Bible history museums – which are housed on four separated pages. An additional page focuses on non-extant and proposed attractions. (2) A ‘Map’ portal uses Google technology to display the attractions on a global geo-political map. Four colors, aligning with the four categories, enable visitors to visually explore where attractions are located and clustered. (3) A ‘Tours’ portal explores individual attractions, combining fieldwork photography and/or video; publicity materials; archival scans; hyperlinks to relevant data and scholarship; and, narrative description. (4) An index for a physical archive of project materials is maintained, including visitor materials

³*Materializing the Bible* has catalogued more than 450 attractions. Of these, the vast majority are affiliated as Protestant and Catholic. The remaining few (<15%) are affiliated as Jewish or LDS. While Protestant and Catholic attractions reference primarily the same canonized scripture, Jewish and LDS attractions integrate references (respectively) to Talmudic texts and the Book of Mormon. The Protestant and Catholic attractions reference a wide range of Bible translations, but no significant difference has been observed in the process of re-creating material replicas based on ideologically preferred translations. This remains an open question, however, and an area for future inquiry. As an anthropological project, *Materializing the Bible* is grounded in an approach to the social life of scriptures that recognizes ‘the Bible’ as a contingent social, historical, and ideological textual product (see Malley 2004).

(e.g., guidebooks for extant and non-extant attractions) and a range of related religious ephemera dating from the early 1800s to the present. Selected archival materials are digitized here for viewing and download. (5) Finally, a ‘Scholarship’ section integrates multiple features. An interdisciplinary bibliography of scholarly publications that address specific attractions is maintained. This bibliography is complemented by discussion questions written for university courses. Other portals designed to aid research and teaching include a collection of ‘park maps,’ a visual technology that contributes to the choreography of visitor experience, and a ‘reporting archive,’ which tracks public writing about major attractions (e.g., Museum of the Bible in Washington, DC). Through these five areas, *Materializing the Bible* asks how visitors might get caught up in a virtual encounter with the attractions in order to foster an anthropological understanding of scripture, religious tourism, and material religion.

In developing this project, definite limitations have arisen. In several ways, the limitations ensue from the digital platform itself. *Weebly* is a widely-used platform for building relatively simple web interfaces. It is a closed system, meaning a range of external plug-ins are not available for integration. For example, an interactive timeline plug-in to represent when and where biblically themed attractions have been created would be a valuable presentation of data. Further, the set-up of site design provides for a largely linear experience, such as scrolling unidirectionally from top to bottom. Another area of limitation concerns the relative dearth of data on visitor practices at attractions. Most of the data, we are able to present focuses on the attractions themselves, their choreography, publicity, and production. A more holistic analysis will require more data on how visitors create multiple itineraries and practices of engagement throughout highly choreographed religious spaces.

Working within the confines of these limitations, two factors have been especially influential for expanding the project. First, not only does the project fundamentally rely on the technological infrastructure of a digital world, it relies as well on the use of the same infrastructure by attractions. From designing elaborate webpages to uploading visitor materials, *Materializing the Bible* assembles a collection of resources made available by attractions using digital media for publicity. Second, the development of the project has been professionally collaborative on multiple levels. I designed and built the launch version with an undergraduate research assistant, and have relied on the labor and talents of further undergraduate research assistants to maintain and expand the project.⁴ Further, colleagues at multiple universities in multiple countries have either consulted on the project’s design or contributed original research content, enriching the empirical reach of the project beyond the capacities of a single scholar.⁵

Immersion

This article is reflexive, as it examines the fact that *Materializing the Bible* is shaped by the same culture of entertainment prizing immersive play as the religious phenomenon we seek to understand. This is not to say, of course, that the two are isomorphic. The

⁴I acknowledge here Amanda White, Claire Vaughn, and Kaila Sansom. Also, the Miami University Humanities Center has been instrumental in providing financial support through its Undergraduate Research Apprentice Award.

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primary difference is that *Materializing the Bible* is a work of critical scholarship, whereas the attractions are designed for religious devotion, pedagogy, fun, and/or evangelism. The project presents the historical and ethnographic material as data, works comparatively, and hopes to foster a more refined anthropological understanding of how attractions work as forms of lived religion. The attractions, on the other hand, promote theologically motivated ideologies of scripture and attempt to choreograph visitor experience for heightened religious intimacy and conversion.

Despite this fundamental divide, there is an important parallel: both the project and its empirical object share an imperative to immerse visitors into a curated world. As a cultural practice, biblically themed environments want physical visitors to be caught up in experiencing an ideological rendering of the biblical past, promising unique access to the stories of scripture. For example, a re-creation of Noah's ark (Genesis 6–9) at a creationist theme park in northern Kentucky promises visitors that they will be able to gaze upon, step inside, and roam about an architectural replication built to the 'exact' measurements named in the Bible (Bielo 2018). As a digital scholarship project, *Materializing the Bible* wants virtual visitors to be caught up in exploring the tourist worlds created by these attractions. The immersive imperative is pursued most fully in the 'Tours' portal, where visitors are partially transported through photographic and scanned images, audio, and video. The hoped-for immersion in a digital context has definite and fixed limitations that do not confine experience at physical attractions (e.g., smelling the timber onboard a re-created Noah's ark; the embodied presence of being surrounded by other visitors). Still, our ambition is akin to that of most any digitized archival collection: we want visitors to be (at least) momentarily lost in the world of this religious phenomenon.

Immersive play demands the creativity of human imagination, and it entails an interactive engagement with sensuous materiality. The sensory experience of bodies, placement in physical spaces of cultivated nature and human engineering, engagement with found and made objects, and use of physical and digital technologies: these provide the raw material for creating immersive experiences (Lukas 2016). To explore the convergence between the empirical target and the digital scholarship project, I turn now to some of the techniques employed by each as they respectively seek to achieve their desired immersions.

Immersive techniques

What counts as an immersive technique? For the purposes of this analysis, I mean any strategy interactively designed to physically or affectively enhance the experience of being caught up. Attractions that materialize the Bible employ a range of techniques to transport visitors from their here and now to an ideological rendering of a biblical there and then. Looking across attractions, at least ten immersive techniques can be distinguished.

- (1) *1:1 Replication*. From Noah's ark to Solomon's temple, architectural dimensions recorded in scripture are used as building guides. A common example is the Tabernacle in the Wilderness (Exodus 25). With appeals to being 'life-size' and 'full-sized,' these attractions promise visitors an experience of spatial authenticity in which the embodied relationship to space claims exacting verisimilitude.

- (2) *Miniaturized replication.* ‘Exact’ replication is also performed through scale modeling, which integrates claims of architectural accuracy with an aerial visual gaze. Scaled replications of the city of Jerusalem are a common example. For instance, the Holy Land Experience in Orlando, Florida features a floor model that visitors can encircle and inspect, as well as experience guided tours of the model that mimic evangelical pilgrimage to Israel and the West Bank.
- (3) *Re-enactment.* From costumed tour guides to living history re-enactors, attractions use face-to-face human performance to conjure biblical history. Period dress, physical technology, and animals function as material props. Examples range from the theatrical Passion Play performed in Oberammergau (Germany) once a decade since 1634 to Ohio’s Living Word Outdoor Drama, performed twice weekly June–September since 1975.
- (4) *Flora.* Estimates by theologians and botanists vary, but there are at least 100 varieties of flora named in biblical texts. Biblical gardens – attractions that cultivate trees, flowers, herbs, and plants of the Bible – mobilize visitors’ sensorium to access the natural world of scripture. Gardens range widely in size, from congregational plots measuring a few square meters to Neot Kedumim in Israel, a 625 acre ‘biblical landscape preserve’ (cf. Bielo 2017).
- (5) *Landscape materials.* Along with native plants, attractions integrate landscape materials from ‘the Holy Land’ as conduits for the natural setting of biblical stories. Stones, sand, soil, and vials of water have all been used for this effect. For example, since 1958 the Garden of Hope in northern Kentucky has presented visitors with displayed stones from the Western Wall, the Jordan River, the Samaritan Inn, and the Horns of Hattin (which some theologians claim as the site where Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount).
- (6) *Meals.* Activating the senses through biblical flora is also performed through serving a ‘biblical meal.’ Using spices, fruits, vegetables, and grains from ‘biblical times,’ and ‘first century’ culinary techniques, this performance enables visitors to ingest the Word, eating what Jesus ate. Nazareth Village – ‘a first century farm and village’ in northern Israel operating since 2000 – serves dry yeast wheat bread, hummus, olives, lentil soup, cabbage salad, and seasonal fruit (cf. Ron and Timothy 2013).
- (7) *Aurality.* Attractions choreograph visitors’ aural experience to enhance the immersive play. Kentucky’s Ark Encounter (est. July 2016) is particularly adept with this technique. As visitors move among different teaching exhibits the soundscape shifts. For example, in the ‘Living Quarters’ Shem’s wife stands working in the kitchen display: an intricately arranged scene is full of (plastic) foodstuffs, such as hanging garlic. The sound of contented work streams from overhead: she hums peacefully, even delightedly, while a knife chops methodically and scrapes to the side.
- (8) *Physical technology.* While re-enactments integrate individual devices, some attractions emphasize ‘first century’ technology. For example, since 2006 the Biblical History Center in La Grange, Georgia has guided visitors through functioning replicas of subsistence technologies (e.g., an olive crusher that you can push along a 360-degree path). Each replica is accompanied by biblical texts and the interaction between scripture and replica is designed to add hermeneutic nuance and historical context to the textual meaning.

- (9) *Embodied motion.* The movement of bodies through choreographed space is another way attractions retell scriptural stories. Walking paths with replicas of the Stations of the Cross are a prime example. Protestant and Catholic-affiliated attractions design these paths so that visitors can re-imagine, if not re-enact, the 14 stations of Jesus' walk toward crucifixion on the Via Dolorosa.
- (10) *Art.* Ranging widely in aesthetic style and media, artworks in various forms are mobilized by attractions to conjure biblical scenes and stories. Walls are painted and sculptures are crafted. Materials are gathered, fashioned, and repurposed. For example, Mansfield, Ohio's BibleWalk – a wax museum founded in 1987 – collects used wax figures and re-designs them to create static displays of biblical scenes.

As attractions mobilize immersive techniques to engineer experiences of the biblical past for visitors, they reflect and re-create the power of modern entertainment to foster scriptural devotion and pedagogy. With ethnographic and archival materials, *Materializing the Bible* illustrates what these techniques are and enables users to consider how the techniques operate in contexts of religious tourism. But, this project also learns from its empirical target. How we choose to represent data is decided partly on the immersive potential of different strategies. An orienting question for the project has been this: how can we not only curate these attractions, but help visitors get caught up in a virtual encounter with them? While always cognizant of the fundamental divide between digital and physical experience, we have mobilized five different techniques in an effort to immerse visitors.

- (1) *Fieldwork material.* Visual and audio-visual materials produced through fieldwork enable visitors to see selected attractions from multiple vantage points, from major features to idiosyncratic quirks, landscape portraits to pathways to fine-grained details. For the Garden of Hope (Covington, Kentucky) tour, we use several short video clips of guiding performances to re-create something of the experience of an onsite tour.
- (2) *Archival material.* Immersing visitors is aided by providing glimpses into the history and development of attractions. Newspaper and magazine articles help illustrate the continuous presence of attractions on local landscapes. For the Fields of the Wood Bible Park (Murphy, North Carolina) tour, visitors listen to (and read a transcript of) a radio interview conducted with the attraction creator not long before his death in 1943.
- (3) *Publicity material.* Attractions use diverse, mixed-media items to attract visitors. These items are valuable in the context of digital scholarship because they help capture the ways in which attractions self-represent through semiotic registers of marketing and publicity. For example, we use attraction maps; visitor brochures; detailed guidebooks; aerial videos; and, mail postcards. This particular technique poses useful issues of research ethics, such as how the analytical work of the project might risk being complicit in the promotion and success of attractions.
- (4) *Maps.* Spatial maps are a longstanding immersive technique in fantasy world-making (Saler 2012). Maps do not merely locate, they help visitors envision the details of space and place, and imaginatively emplace themselves in the setting. For example, we use geo-political maps to reference legal boundaries, such as a nation-state; highway maps

to establish regional placement; and, aerial views courtesy of Google Earth technology. In a separate portal, we collect attraction maps so that visitors can explore how this familiar visual technology contributes to the spatial choreography.

- (5) *Narrative Description*. While the tours emphasize mixed-media materials, a minimal amount of narrative description is used to orient visitors and progress through these materials. Writing choices are pivotal in this context. Overly analytic and theory-centric registers are avoided, and the language aims to be direct, active, and sensory-rich. For example, in the Biblical History Center (La Grange, Georgia) tour, images of the attraction's primary features are accompanied by short sentences that highlight the bodily engagements that are choreographed: sit, step into, smell, touch, walk, push, and feel. Again, ethical issues emerge with respect to this technique, such as descriptively representing the ambitions of attractions while not reproducing the scriptural ideologies at work.

Immersive argument

Materializing the Bible uses immersive techniques so that visitors can be virtually caught up in the phenomenon of religious tourist attractions that transform the written words of scripture into physical, experiential, and choreographed environments. This immersive ambition fosters curatorial, documentary, and archivist capacities, but curating, documenting, and archiving are not the endgame. This project mobilizes the cultural resonance of immersion to help advance an organizing argument. The project's 'Welcome' page presents visitors with an empirical fact and an analytic question: 'People do more than read Bibles. They use the written words to create material environments. *What happens when the Bible is materialized?*' (emphasis in original). As visitors explore the project, they explore an argument: these attractions construct, perform, and elaborate an affective intimacy with scripture.

The invocation of 'affect' is pivotal. As a conceptual apparatus, affect is valuable because it draws our attention to the entanglements that develop among structural forces, sociality, ideology, materiality, and subjectivity (Supp-Montgomerie 2015). This project begins with the premise that 'the Bible' as a cultural category is not reducible to a printed text that people read, interpret, memorize, and discursively circulate. 'The Bible' has historically been performed through a wide range of experiential registers: from stained glass and other artistic media to film, video games, and toy objects. We have the story of Noah's ark in Genesis 6–9, and we have (among many others) Edward Hicks' widely reprinted 1846 painting, the 1928 romantic melodrama film *Noah's Ark*, the 1991 'Noah's Ark' game portal *Bible Adventures* for Nintendo, craft and mass-produced wooden Noah's ark playsets designed throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, and in 2016 a young earth creationist 'theme park' centered on a 'life-sized' replica of Noah's ark.

These transmedial performances certainly have multiple functions – religious pedagogy, devotion, fun, and evangelism – but their capacity to be efficacious in any function is grounded by an affective relation. Any cognitive knowledge that religious actors develop about scripture is anchored by the development of intense bodily and emotional bonds with scripture. While these affective bonds can certainly support an authoritative view of scripture, they also engage religious actors in an ongoing authorizing process in which the aura of scripture is internalized. The ambition is to experience scripture from

as many angles as possible, in as many sensory configurations as possible, because just as 'the Bible' is inexhaustible for readers it is also experientially inexhaustible.

Attractions like museums, gardens, and theme parks testify to the power of sensory affect. The arrangement of bodily experiences in choreographed space registers effects on and through the sensations of visitors. Ark Encounter, for example, is not merely about teaching creationist biblical history, it is about getting caught up in the multi-sensory presentation of that history. This argument echoes historian Vanessa Agnew's depiction of re-enactment as a form of 'affective history,' in which the past is imagined through the 'physical and psychological experience' of individuals (2007, 301). This mode of performing history aspires to provoke the body, for the body to respond in ways that may or may not have the consent of language or cognition. For example, Agnew (2014) describes the sensorial ambition of 'gooseflesh,' which affective history seeks to achieve as an involuntary aesthetic evaluation. Contrary to the fact that bodies are encultured to respond to particular stimuli in particular ways, gooseflesh promises the consumer of affective history that they are experiencing something timeless and unmediated.

Attractions that materialize the Bible aspire to achieve such bodily provocations, promising visitors an immersive experience of scripture. To illustrate this argument, *Materializing the Bible* employs its own immersive techniques. The affordances of a digital platform parallel the phenomenon being examined, and the project's efficacy cannot be delinked from its technological means. As it aims to understand the power of religious entertainment, this project capitalizes on the strategies and imperatives of entertainment to make its case for developing a more robust anthropological understanding of the social life of scriptures, religious tourism, and material religion. Of course, as noted above, the parallel between the project and its empirical object bears definite limitations. Chief among these is the significant sensory difference between being physically present at attractions and interacting with multi-media materials through a digital interface. Ultimately, at best, the immersive potential of the project can provide but a glimpse of the visceral experience of being onsite.

Conclusion

This article has reflected on how a digital scholarship project in the critical study of religion and its empirical target are saturated by the same culture of entertainment. To close, we return to the organizing interest of this special issue, which is the potential of digital scholarship to complement and productively advance existing modes of inquiry, analysis, and representation.

Materializing the Bible illustrates some familiar observations about digital scholarship. For example, the multi-media capacity addresses limitations of written narrative to represent the sensorial richness of lived religion. If a picture is worth a thousand words, what are interactive images, animated graphics, and video worth? More pragmatically, the carrying capacity of digital projects to convey this richness is astronomical compared to the monetary and physical limitations of print venues (e.g., in reproducing high-quality color images). Furthermore, this carrying capacity is not limited to a single platform: as projects develop they can network across venues to marshal the optimal affordances of each.

Second, as Cantwell and Rashid (2015) have recognized about digital scholarship more broadly, digital platforms are characterized by openness. Once made public, representations

via writing, images, and other media can be edited, added, and deleted. Ideally, scholarly output through open platforms evolves not only with time, but with analysis and understanding of data. (One consequence of this, which begs for the enduring model of print scholarship, is that previous versions can be lost to updated versions.) In this way, digital projects can occupy the dual position of being published, yet still in progress. This both/and quality also enables a newly realized transparency to the research process. ‘Followers’ can keep pace with methodological developments, newly acquired data, and theory formation as it unfolds. For *Materializing the Bible*, this quality of openness has been especially valuable for integrating analyses of ethnographic and archival data, each of which carries significant and distinctive investments of time and research labor.

Finally, I hope that this article’s central analysis – that an analogous relation can animate both a digital project and its empirical target – will be instructive. As we engage the affordances of digital platforms, it is worthwhile to reflect on the ways in which our empirical interests intersect with our conceptual apparatus. Entertainment is not only empirically fascinating and a theoretically productive area to explore, in this project, it has also shaped representational choices and innovations.

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