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FORUM ON "THE BURDENS OF CHURCH HISTORY"
Institutional Dreams

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In *Institutional Dream Series (Sleeping in Public)*, 1972–73, Laurie Anderson slept in eight different public places in order to measure their institutional impression. In her experiment Anderson used dreams—ostensibly her own—"to see if the place can color or control my dreams."[1] The short answer was—yes. *Institutional Dream Series* is an exploration of the self as medium. In sleeping and recording her sleep on the beach at Coney Island, in the halls of night court, at the bureau of immigration and naturalization, and in the women's bathroom at Columbia University Library, Anderson's performance suggests that vulnerability to bureaucratic structures and organizational schemes is not something to be avoided but studied.[2] For there is pleasure, fear, and wisdom to be found in such exposure.

Anderson's experiment speaks from an odd angle to Laurie Maffly-Kipp's 2014 Presidential Address to the American Society of Church History. Maffly-Kipp's reminder in "The Burdens of Church History" that

[1]As quoted in Roselee Goldberg, *Laurie Anderson* (New York: Henry N. Abrams, 2000), 38.

[2]Anticipating Mary Douglas's point in *How Institutions Think* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1986, 3) about the "hold that institutions have on our processes of classifying and recognizing," *Institutional Dream Series* is part of Anderson's abiding concern with the "phenomenology of penetration" not as an ominous process but an inevitable one. Carrie Noland, *Poetry at Stake: Lyric Aesthetics and the Challenge of Technology* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999), 192. There is both a simple and expansive understanding of institutions in Anderson's work. Commercial amusement, race, ethnicity, work, and the gendered body become sites in which the particularities of self, the stuff of one's dreams, are subject to all manner of corporate formation. Representative scholarly works that think about the processes of institutionalism beyond the brick and mortar include John P. Burris, *Exhibiting Religion: Colonialism and Spectacle at International Expositions, 1851–1893* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2002), Kathryn Lofton, *Oprah: The Gospel of an Icon* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), Sylvester Johnson, *The Myth of Ham in Nineteenth-Century American Christianity: Race, Heathenism, and the People of God* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), Jean Camaroff and John L. Camaroff, *Ethnicity, Inc.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), Richard Callahan, *Work and Faith in the Kentucky Coal Fields* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), Lynne Gerber, *Seeking the Straight and Narrow: Weight Loss and Sexual Reorientation in America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), and Michelle Murphy, *Sick Building Syndrome and the Problem of Uncertainty: Environmental Politics, Technoscience, and Women Workers* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2006).

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organization comes in many shapes and sizes is a welcome one. Maffly-Kipp echoes the call, issued by Harry S. Stout and D. Scott Cormode a few years back, to tend to the "possibilities of redefining institutional history so it becomes a mediating perspective that encompasses both structural and cultural history, thus pointing the way towards an inclusive social history of religion."[3] I appreciate Maffly-Kipp's insistence on the analytic primacy of church because it redirects attention to cognition and passion and effervescence amidst organizational environments. So despite the fact that I may fall under Maffly-Kipp's description of a "scholarly free agent"—I wholeheartedly endorse her insistence that we must leave "ourselves open to alternative understanding of what constitutes church history itself."[4]

The thread that I find most fascinating in Maffly-Kipp's address is her demand for more fine-tuned reflexivity: about the need to tend to—"in our scholarship"—the historicity of categorical transition underway and the future of any movement. This reflexivity is, in part, the burden of church history. It is a burden that we should not (because we cannot) jettison.[5] And it is a burden that generates all manner of urgent theoretical questions: What kinds of practices have suited particular forms of an institutional imaginary?[6] What kinds of sociality were promoted and/or occluded by particular institutional formations? What kinds of rationalities have undergirded these socialities and these formations?

A renewed focus on religious institutions would allow for a more robust picture of lives and tensions without reducing things to mere identity or mere advantage—a more complex understanding of agency than the choice-engine-self favored by the spiritual-but-not-religious types and their scholarly interpreters.[7] And amidst a relentless political push to delegitimize institutions, Maffly-Kipp's essay is born of sharp-edged, progressive intentions and offers a subtle skewering of those whose scholarly proclivities

[3]*Sacred Companies: Organizational Aspects of Religion and Religious Aspects of Organizations*, eds. N. J. Demerath III, Peter Dobkin Hall, Terry Schmitt, and Rhys H. Williams (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 62. See, also, the groundbreaking *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, eds. Walter W. Powell and Paul J. Dimaggio (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991) and Roger Friedland's "Divine Institution: Max Weber's Value Spheres and Institutional Theory," *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 41 (2014): 217–258.

[4]Laurie Maffly-Kipp, "The Burdens of Church History," *Church History* 82, no. 2 (June 2013): 356, 366.

[5]Ibid., 361, 365.

[6]This would require a tweaking of Charles Taylor's useful concept of the "social imaginary," used to refer to "the way in which people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" ("Modern Social Imaginaries," *Public Culture* 14, no. 1 [Winter 2002]: 106).

[7]On the scholarly effect of such liberal sentiment, see Tracy Fessenden, "The Problem of the Postsecular," *American Literary History* 26, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 154–167.

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she sees as having been inflected by a neo-liberal imaginary. There is the compulsion to privatize to our detriment and church history may be a progressive counterweight.

Maffly-Kipp's writes of "mental conversations" with historical actors for whom church mattered, experiences that parallel Anderson's institutional dreams. For the burden of church history is, among other things, the call to converse more humanely with the dead. And although Maffly-Kipp does not address the presence and circulations of metaphysical traditions or *their* conversations with the dead, her historiographical insight parallels much recent work on occult histories and their relationship to 'secular' modes of inquiry.[8] This is my kind of history and so I share, as a general matter, Maffly-Kipp's unease with the willingness to narrow the terms of scholarly conversation with the dead—for these dead speak a strange and pressing language.

Maffly-Kipp demonstrates the importance of church (and its spectral excess) through the example of George Freeman Bragg and his insistence on the mediating power of institutions to simultaneously enable, constrain, and perhaps even liberate. Bragg's loyalty to an Episcopal Church whose racism was manifest sheds light on the complexities of the human psyche and the tensions of living in a world that does not necessarily conform itself to one's desire but more often than not actively thwarts it. Maffly-Kipp argues that there are subtleties to the religious life that can be overlooked when institutional demands and incentives are not accounted for. Consequently, one must entertain questions of sociality and dream life as much as church membership.[9] According to Maffly-Kipp, "Church was, for many African Americans, material evidence of a community that connected them to the dead, that anchored their activities in the present, and that pointed them toward a different kind of future."[10] This is an elegant rendering and begs the question(s): what are the mechanics of connection, grounding and orientation?

The archive (talk about an institution!) is the best place to begin to address such questions. Even more so because the traditional work of church historians mirrors the work that has and must continue to be performed within the church

[8]Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind and Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007); Robert S. Cox, *Body and Soul: A Sympathetic History of American Spiritualism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2003); Molly McGarry, *Ghosts of Futures Past: Spiritualism and the Cultural Politics of Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Darryl Caterine, *Haunted Ground: Journeys Through a Paranormal America* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2011); Jason Ananda Josephson, "God's Shadow: Occluded Possibilities in the Genealogy of 'Religion,'" *History of Religions* 52, no. 4 (May 2013): 309–339.

[9]Maffly-Kipp, "The Burdens of Church History," 354.

[10]Ibid., 355.

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("painstakingly record[ing] baptisms, catechists, church growth, church debates, social outreach, and list[ing] prominent leaders in the movement"[11]). Maffly-Kipp is worried that the hard and boring work of grasping the historical particularity of the church is being superseded by the spectacle of the new—cultural studies and the intellectual acrobatics (spinning in the air and spinning in circles no less being the essential image) of Karl Marx and Michel Foucault. The kind of work Maffly-Kipp aims to counter is not discussed beyond its explicit association with these iconic figures and an implicit sense of narcissism, neglect, and beside-the-point theorization. But a portrait does emerge in bits and pieces.

As Maffly-Kipp observes, her concern over a decreasing "salience of church as a category of analysis" happens at a moment when institutions, in general, are under assault by neo-liberal schemes.[12] An ominous future is projected by way of literary allusion: "I would submit that, rather than opening up our historical explanations to a brave new world of cultural analysis, our own concepts of individual identities and selfhood as the preeminent concerns of religious subjects block us from—dare I say it—recognizing the profound ecclesiastical pleasures and collective commitments of historical agents."[13]

I, too, am concerned about the analytical occlusions that stem from an ignorance of institutions but I respectfully and steadfastly disagree with Maffly-Kipp's suggestion that too much "cultural analysis" limits our analytical imagination.[14] Here a progressive politics is welded to a conservative defense of an institutional (an identifiable and therefore peculiar) tradition. A defense against what or whom, exactly, I am not sure but I do not share her sense that "a brave new world of cultural analysis" hovers, ready to incur and to enact its limitations. Of course, some instances of cultural analysis do little more than extend the ideological intensities of their moment. Just as many church histories address only the most obvious and visible manifestations of "church" and do an incredible disservice to the power of institutional life in general and the problem of protestant indelibility in particular.[15] There is enough bad scholarship to go around.

[11]Ibid., 353.
[12]Ibid., 355.
[13]Ibid., 355–356.
[14]Few people who have read Marx or Foucault affirm the kind of agent that Maffly-Kipp fears is trending during this scholarly flight away from institutional concerns. The analysis of social forces in light of ideology, affect, and/or disciplinary mechanisms is often central to most work that draws on Marx or Foucault.
[15]On the discourse of non-specific protestantism, see Tracy Fessenden, *Culture and Redemption: Religion, the Secular, and American Literature* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2007). Cultural analysis seems to be a fruitful approach to the shadowy Christian character of American society, with its local and general styles of piety and practices of solidarity, for there is a voluntarism at the heart of liberal subjectivity as well as an evangelical public sphere. In order to even begin to gain analytic purchase on the common sense epistemics of white protestant

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But might the insights of cultural analysis catalyze the tradition of inquiry that Maffly-Kipp seeks to defend? Might they provide an opportunity to better appreciate the complex entity of our analytics? How might these insights help resolve an impasse so as to be able to think, collectively, about religious institutions in ways that do not reproduce thin descriptions and dull analyses that characterize so much recent scholarship?[16]

Maffly-Kipp suggests that the advances made by social history and other culturalist perspectives "have taken our work out of the church, and certainly have placed us at a far remove from the post-World War II focus on institutional life of which Wilhelm Pauck spoke."[17] Trained in Germany, Pauck was a distinguished professor of church history associated with the liberal wing of American protestantism. He taught at the University of Chicago Divinity School, Union Seminary, and Stanford University, among other institutions. He was deeply invested in writing history in conversation with theological partners such as Karl Barth, Paul Tillich, and Reinhold Niebuhr.

Maffly-Kipp recommends Pauck's 1952 *Church History* article for its insight into the "importance of religious institutional life in the early 1950s."[18] Maffly-Kipp notes how Pauck addressed, through his Cold War lens, a postwar revival of interest in a notion of church. In doing so, he focused on something that is too often ignored—a sense of transcendental duty to religious organization. With general atomic anxiety, protestants in general had begun to unify against the spectral competition of communism and Roman Catholicism. In addition to his description of the scene, Pauck was also prescriptive, interested as he was in the contemporary re-orientation of protestantism. In light of this new market for institutional allegiance, protestants must come to a "fresh understanding of the distinctive functions and mission of the Christian Church."[19]

masculinity, even an expanded understanding of religious institution must be supplemented by questions of ideology and discourse.

[16]Although I do not have space to address the occlusions at work in the use of church as an analytic in the institutional setting of church history, I wonder whether a séance table could become the subject of sustained scrutiny in Maffly-Kipp's renewed church history paradigm? Could an auditing session of early Scientology or an instance of Reichian group therapy at Esalen? What about online activity that is at once most intimate and particular and already a focus on institutional reform, i.e., the totalizing schemes of predictive analytics? (See "Predictive Analytics," IBM, http://www-03.ibm.com/software/products/en/category/predictive-analytics.) What about watching an episode of Oprah with the secure knowledge that millions of others are or have or will be watching the same episode and feeling the same kind of thing? I would hope that these examples be included in a comparative frame—for these too are part of an institutional history of American religion.

[17]Maffly-Kipp, "The Burdens of Church History," 360.

[18]Ibid., 359.

[19]Wilhelm Pauck, "The Idea of Church in Christian History," *Church History* 21, no. 3 (September 1952): 192.

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Pauck's article, published the same month that the Hubbard Association of Scientologists was established in Phoenix, Arizona, is a riveting document. For in addition to his archival focus on the church as historical entity, Pauck also offers a valuable peek outside. And it is this peek, with Marx and Foucault (and perhaps Freud) as my witnesses, that is telling. For after providing an "instructive" genealogy of the idea of church in Christian history up through the Reformation (the bulk of Pauck's article), Pauck notes with melancholic admiration how protestantism has been particularly affected by "secularization of the state and the economic order"—ideas of religious toleration, humanism and suspicion of hierarchical sacramentalism, exposure to print media, etc. The benefits of modernization have come at a cost to protestantism's brand identity in terms of both message and structural integrity: "The character of the ecclesia was more and more determined by reference to what were no longer vitally effective historical traditions or to social, economic or political factors. The churches became 'feudalistic,' 'bourgeois' or 'proletarian.' They lost the relationship with the 'sacred' center. The meaning of the word 'church' based upon the meaning of the word 'ecclesia' was dimmed. 'Denominations' came into being." This is a profound insight and one made even more poignant by Pauck's recommended solution: "contemporary Protestants [must] develop a doctrine of the church which convincingly states the Christian conviction that Christians are a 'peculiar people.' It is gratifying to note that the activities of the World Council of Churches are primarily directed toward the accomplishment of this end." Pauck's penchant for scare quotes is suggestive for at some level Pauck is figuring change over time here as conceptual as well as material and structural. Might Pauck's penchant speak to his sensitivity to emergent forms of institutional mediation—the promises and demands made by concepts, circa 1952, and their constellations?[20]

Given the political and economic and yes, theological inflections of Pauck's apparently neutral description of the contemporary Christian condition circa 1952, my sense is that "various types of cultural analysis" must be employed in order to begin to situate Pauck's "focus" within the institutional history he is narrating and to recognize our burden, as historians, to respond to his argument, in the present institutional moment, with both sympathy and skepticism. For despite Pauck's missionary charms, his article highlights a most significant development in the "institutional lives" of church members—a process he calls "secularization" and one that, in hindsight, might be

[20]Pauck, "The Idea of Church in Christian History," 211–213. A unified Christianity may well be on the horizon, suggested Pauck, presaged by the "rapprochement of the several Protestant groups and churches toward one another" (192). This conciliatory momentum would be more fully developed in the various conformity critiques of the 1950s, including Will Herberg's *Protestant, Catholic, Jew* (New York: Doubleday, 1955).

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understood as the saturation of microlevel deployments of a political rationality and technological strategies in domains for which they were not initially intended.

This is the language of scientific management and operation research. This is the conceptual drift from business and military strategy into institutions that tended to mental health, biology, education, public policy, and religion. This is the flourishing of self by way of corporate promise delivered in manners most efficient and shiny. Modernity happened and it happened because of the churches but it also happened to the churches by way of people on the ground, in public, sleeping or otherwise. Organization made its way in and out through dreams.[21]

My sense, then, is that churches in the American grain—organizational structures that congeal over time and space around an explicit orientation to religion—are part of a larger story about secular modernity. That is not all they are but without this frame one loses much purchase on, for lack of a better word, context. For these religious organizations *are part of* the difference that unprecedented forms of organization have made over the past few hundred years. So if I were president of the Society of Church History and speaking to you right now I would not advocate "turning the tables on Marx and Foucault."[22] On the contrary, I would urge you all to read and

[21]Such a line of inquiry would be attentive to market rhetorics, political economy, and scientific theories of management. See, for example, Scientology's construction of a "leading edge[] of Christian experience" (Maffly-Kipp, "The Burdens of Church History," 366) in the 1950s. See, also, the relationship between religion and the language of systems management in "Strength and Weakness of the Popular Religion and of Liberal Christianity," *Christian Examiner* 64 (March 1858): 209–233; Louis B. Weeks, "The Incorporation of the Presbyterians," in *The Organizational Revolution: Presbyterians and American Denominationalism*, Milton J. Coalter, et al., eds. (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), and John Corrigan, *Business of the Heart: Religion and Emotion in the Nineteenth Century* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002). For perspective on the institutional difference that modernity makes, see Harvey M. Wagner, "Practical Slants on Operations Research," *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 41 (May–June, 1963): 61–71; Alfred Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977); Donna J. Haraway, "Signs of Dominance: From a Physiology to a Cybernetics of Primate Society," *Studies in History of Biology* 6 (1983): 129–219; and Agatha C. Hughes and Thomas Parke Hughes. *Systems, Experts, and Computers: The Systems Approach in Management and Engineering, World War II and After* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2000).

[22]Maffly-Kipp, 363. One could argue that the tables have been turned for a while now, or perhaps never even set up. The citational life of Marx within the pages of *Church History* would be an interesting digital humanities project to pursue. As far as I can tell, there has been little engagement with Foucault's idea outside the quick reference in book review or commentaries. He is cited in a handful of articles (mostly as an authority on monasticism) and mentioned occassionaly in a book review or commentary but precious few instances in the last 40 years where Foucault is being called up to expand the methodological horizon of church history. The lack of sustained engagement is regrettable. Exceptions include: Edward J. Gitre, "The 1904–05 Welsh Revival: Modernization, Technologies, and Techniques of the Self," *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 73, no. 4 (December 2004): 792–827; David Brakke, "The

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teach Marx and Foucault to your students in order to gain perspective on the technological, economic, and political environments in and through which any church emerges and sustains.[23]

Like Maffly-Kipp, I acknowledge that institutions affect our dreams, which is to say, affect parts of ourselves to which we have little access and even less control over. Consequently, the significance of religious institutions cannot be reduced to either instrumental, structural, or agentive explanation. They are intensely symbolic and effusive. "Institutions do not just constrain options: they establish the very criteria by which people discover their preferences."[24] Consequently, their moral force must be considered. And who better to assess such power than those who study the ways and means of piety? And like Maffly-Kipp I worry about how best to address our vulnerability to and ignorance of "the powerful forces that shape our social lives."[25] But I do so because I sense a tradition of unwillingness when it comes to church historians tending to questions being raised outside of church history, literally and metaphorically speaking. Such questions could complement the collective knowledge of the ASCH. Offering caveats about a cultural turn in American church history (however one might define it) rather than seeking ways across this turn does not bode well for subtle understandings of institutional expanse and sophisticated renderings of "the many and varied ways through which we are constituted as subjects."[26]

Making of Monastic Demonology: Three Ascetic Teachers on Withdrawal and Resistance" *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 70, no. 1 (March 2001): 19–48; Elizabeth A. Clark, "The Lady Vanishes: Dilemmas of a Feminist Historian after the 'Linguistic Turn,'" *Church History: Studies in Christianity and Culture* 67, no. 1 (March 1998): 1–31.

[23]I am thinking, in particular, of Marx on ideology and commodity fetishism and Foucault on the religious origins of secular modes of governmentality. See, for example, Michel Foucault, "The Subject and Power," in *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics*, 2nd ed., eds. Hubert L. Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 208–226. In keeping with Maffly-Kipp's insistence on scholarly reflexivity, Marx and Foucault might help illuminate the scholarly monisms and reductionisms that occur, in part, because of the unspecified and unacknowledged protestantisms that course through the methodological framework of the field. On the practical use of Marx, Foucault, and other forms of cultural analysis, see the special issue on the field of American religions for *Religion* 42, no. 3 (June 2012). This collection of essays, edited by Finbarr Curtis, offer a powerful critique of the legacy of church history in the study of American religion.

[24]Walter W. Powell and Paul J. Dimaggio, "Introduction," *The New Institutionalism in Organizational Analysis*, 11.

[25]Maffly-Kipp 361.

[26]Ibid., 362. For promising lines of inquiry into the institutional expanse of American religion, see Michael Warner's work on transnationalism and the evangelical public sphere, Susan Harding's analysis of the force of linguistic networks, Jason Bivins' anatomy of the institutional lives of fear, and Courtney Bender's mapping of new age social networks in Cambridge, MA. Michael Warner, "The Evangelical Public Sphere" [http://repository.upenn.edu/rosenbach/2/]; Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell; Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2000); Jason C. Bivins, *Religion of Fear: The Politics of Horror in Contemporary Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008); Courtney Bender,

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The loss of church as a universal rubric, I contend, is not necessarily a loss of interpretive possibilities. Nor is it a demotion of the archive. Rather it is an opportunity for more subtle, rigorous, and multi-tiered analysis of it. It is an invitation to dream the institutional and to question how you approach and handle the archive, its contradictions and pleasures and inconsistencies and the experience of sometimes being overwhelmed by it.

The New Metaphysicals: Spirituality and the American Religious Imagination (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010). Other works that betray more than a casual reading of Foucault and Marx but nonetheless address the methodological problems at hand include Webb Keane, *Christian Moderns: Freedom and Fetish in the Mission Encounter* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007); Matthew Engelke's *God's Agents: Biblical Publicity in Contemporary England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013); and Sonia Hazard's "The Material Turn in the Study of Religion," *Religion and Society* 4 (2013): 58–78.

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