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### Abstract

A recent study of a magazine distributed by a powerful conservative Christian group determined the organization showed strong concern for “visual culture.” The publication directed its readers on how to understand the seen world. The current study analyzes a periodical of an avowedly secular group to understand how they might manifest similar or different concerns. On the whole, the content of the magazine called *The Humanist* appears to indicate that visual culture is as important to agnostics as it is to theists.

**Keywords:** Visual Culture; Religion; Magazines; Tribal Media; Agnostic

Do some social groups manifest an exaggerated concern for visual culture, while others do not? One recent study (Popp, 2010) said the answer is yes. Conservative Protestant Christian bodies are, according to the research, extremely cautious with what they see and what they know will be seen by others. Those groups recognize how public imagery is powerful and can support or undermine their values.

But what of groups that claim their ideology has no religious underpinnings? Given that they are presumably so starkly different from conservative Protestant Christian bodies, do they manifest little or no concern for “visual culture”? In the ensuing pages, following the lead of research by Richard Popp (2010), I investigate this issue by analyzing how *The Humanist* (a magazine by and for citizens whose theological orientation most would describe as “liberal,” and certainly not “Christian”) interacts with that phenomenon. I will consider the extent to which the magazine encourages readers to understand the visual world and its power to “nurture or poison” the values humanists hold dear (Popp, 2010, p. 499).

In the end, I suggest that Popp’s query raises as many questions as it answers, and we should welcome those questions. In his study, he claimed to witness a unique form of religion which he often labels as “conservative Christian” (Popp, 2010, p. 501). Though Popp provides no formal definition of “conservative Christian,” for the sake of clarity I will use the term “conservative” to describe adherence to tradition and the word “Christian” in reference to people who worship Jesus, a historic figure they see as divine.<sup>1</sup> These admittedly simplistic definitions allow commencement of study, and can be interrogated in the discussion section of this paper. For now, I suggest that *The Humanist* offers scholars of communication and religion ample areas for further inquiry, as this presumably “liberal” (not attached to tradition) “secular” (seeing nothing as divine) publication engaged in many of the same practices the conservative Christian one did. And, this finding indicates that our very terms for some of these phenomena need greater attention.

### Visual Culture and Conservative Protestant Christianity

Popp (2010, p. 498) defines “visual culture” as “the practices of constructing, seeing, and making sense of visual environments.” He demonstrates studying visual culture is vitally important for scholars in communication, given its power in societal formation and maintenance. He relies on Berger (1972) to establish the basic principle that our “ways of seeing” (p. 10)—a term used by the earlier writer—are important, and thus contested. Berger’s work, along with that of other scholars such as Hall (1980) and Morgan (2005), reveals a power dynamic that takes place in the visual world. How people make sense of images has significant impact on how they live their lives. Popp, following

the work of Promey (1993; 2001), argues that attention to visual culture creates citizens who are concerned with “visual accessibility.” People understand and are fully aware that what they see around them “will also be seen by many unknown others” (Popp, 2010, p. 499).

More narrowly, Popp wishes to investigate “religious visual culture.” Following Morgan (2005), he argues this narrower concept is worthy of special attention. Popp claims that religious visual culture: 1) lays out boundaries between the sacred and profane; 2) leads viewers to interpret things from a religious framework; 3) can be a means of summoning a deity; 4) suggests the need to act in accordance with the religion; 5) connects believers across time and place; and 6) can be used to displace the imagery of competing religions.

Going a step further, Popp contends even though Protestantism was once an ideology that privileged written texts, it has come to realize that images play a significant role in the shaping and reinforcing of conservative groups such as Focus on the Family. Focus is a parachurch organization founded by James Dobson, a psychologist who, after publishing a number of parenting guides, branched out to other media. He eventually developed an organization that at one point employed more than 1,400 people and reached millions by radio, magazine and other media channels (Stepp, 1990; MacQuarrie, 2005; Sprengelmeyer, 2005).<sup>2</sup> Popp claims Focus—more specifically, its nationally distributed *Citizen* magazine—is a good site for study of the way visual culture is addressed within conservative Protestantism. In 2013, Focus on the Family listed circulation of the publication to be 44,000 (Focus on the Family, 2013, p. 4).<sup>3</sup>

One of the key points of the 2010 investigation is that Focus used its magazine to “blot out imagery that marks public space as secular-liberal in nature” and fill the space with other imagery that “marked it as Christian” (Popp, 2010, p. 499). Popp contends this is a regular occurrence in *Citizen*, a periodical that sees its audience as a crucial part of the culture wars. He writes of the publication:

“In this sense, it presents visual culture as a terrain over which forces of good and evil are engaged in a contest for control. Throughout the pages of *Citizen*, Focus depicted this battle as playing out between conservative Christians and secular-liberals.” (503)

As demonstration of this, Popp engaged in a discourse analysis of every issue of the monthly<sup>4</sup> for a four-year period. Therein, he attempted to understand how the group used “language and images to fuse a range of social phenomena together into a seemingly coherent way of understanding the world” (Popp, 2010, p. 503). What he found could be summarized as follows:

- An article that objected to some of the quotations printed on Starbucks’ coffee sleeves (p. 504).
- Six articles that discussed the covering or removal of religious symbols such as crosses or images of Jesus (p. 505).
- Four articles about students’ rights—or challenges to their rights—to wear religiously oriented, or anti-abortion t-shirts to school (p. 505).
- An article about removal of little “green plastic army men” from a school because they showed traditional gender representations (p. 505).
- Three articles on citizens who had “successfully fought to clean up the visual environment” (p. 506), for example, having convinced stores to cover over sexually suggestive magazines in checkout lines.
- One article expressing concern about a new line of scantily dressed “Tramp Barbie” dolls (p. 506).
- Five articles dealing with Biblical imagery in American history or visual representation in extant government documents and buildings (pp. 505-506).
- Fifteen<sup>5</sup> articles discussing conflicts over copies of the Decalogue in public spaces (p. 509-511).

I will propose that a way to conceptualize this group of stories—though Popp does not frame them in such a manner—is to group them into two categories. There are stories that express Focus on the Family's concern for ungodly visual culture and stories that celebrate godly visual culture. As a subgroup of the second category, there are stories that express anxiety when others threaten to remove godly culture.

At first glance, this conceptualization does seem to imply that a non-religious publication might expend less attention on visual culture. One might presume a group without a deity would care little about “godly” communication. In the next section, however, I delineate how recent scholarship in religion and media clearly indicates ways in which agnostics might care about “godly” and “ungodly” communication as much as theists do.

### “Unsecular” and “Tribal” Media

Though Popp (2010) refers to Focus on the Family as a “far right Christian group, (p. 498)” and chooses to analyze *Citizen*, the organization's “news magazine (p. 499),” he does not provide a theoretical understanding of how the publication might fit within the broader context of religion and media in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. Such an oversight might remind some of Hoover and Venturelli's (1996) oft-cited essay about religion being the “blindspot” of much contemporary theory. Popp's interest in Focus largely revolves around their *politics* of religion (and family). Thus lacking is a general sense of how *Citizen* can be envisioned within the current media/religion milieu. The analysis below presupposes that a more encompassing perspective can be found in the work of Quentin J. Schultze, especially his extensive analysis in *Christianity and the American Mass Media* (2005). The ensuing discussion will also utilize the work of Mark Silk, providing additional understanding of religion in media culture.

In his writing, Schultze paints a picture of a U.S. media system that has roots in Christianity, but does not always draw nourishment from those roots. Ultimately, the media attempt to cut themselves off and only draw from those roots when necessary. The media of the country were once “grounded in the particularly Protestant notion that communication, including the press, had the power to change people, to beneficially alter their perspective, and to usher them into a new community of hope” (p. 10). In the 20th century, however, these mass communication channels began to focus intently on creating “new, market driven rituals” (p. 28). Within this setting, Christians have developed a somewhat ambivalent attitude toward the mass communication environment in which they live. The church, as Schultze describes it, alternatively focuses on negative and positive aspects of the media (p. 15). Specifically, the former might entail threats of secularization. The latter is exemplified in opportunities, evangelism specifically, provided by technological channels. Simply stated, these Christians feel that the media sometimes ignore their values and, at other times, blatantly attack those values. Many people of faith, in spite of all this, also perceive mass communication channels to be the best means possible for spreading their own message.

Given their lack of control over mainstream media, believers are required to enlist their own “tribal” media to propagate any ideas they feel dominant channels avoid or corrupt. They fully realize the mass communication system has power, and that the power cannot be ignored. “America is a lively symbolic arena, according to Schultze, “in which tribal and mainstream rhetorics interact partly in and through the media” (p. 10). Put differently, tribes have “used their own communication channels to critique the wider cultural world in which they lived and in so doing reminded themselves who they were and what they believed and felt” (p. 28).

Schultze, then, might not be at all surprised that a conservative Christian organization would use its magazine to present a very tribal view of contemporary American culture. Focus on the Family is “conservative” in the sense that it wishes to preserve many traditions from what it perceives to be a strongly religious culture. It is “Christian” in thinking that Jesus Christ is the center of that culture. The group's publications attempt to defend traditions and theology it feels the more general culture is abandoning, or even affronting.

Though Schultze does not extend his argument in the proposed direction, I will claim his thesis logically implies that a “tribal” medium intended for an audience of avowed humanists would also demonstrate attempts to wrestle with mainstream culture. More simply, the theoretical platform for his analysis might apply to ardent humanists as much as it does to zealous theists. Early in his study, Schultze says, “The Christian metanarrative of transcendence assumes a theistic perspective where God acts in real human history” (p. 1). As comments above reveal, the mainstream media have largely abandoned that *weltanschauung*. But, they cannot completely do so. To help clarify that point, we might entertain the work of another contemporary theorist on religion and media, Mark Silk.

In *Unsecular Media* (1995), Silk offers a description of American media that shares points in common with the previous researcher. He agrees that American media depend on a foundation in Christian culture for much of their worldview. In fact, he focuses more on the media's affinity for traditional religion than does Schultze. His argument is that many of the basic principles by which the media operate are *topoi* (commonplace themes used by a group of people to make sense of their world) derived from Judaism and Christianity.

One might quibble with Silk about the degree to which the derivation just mentioned takes place. Or, as Moore (2008) did in a study of news coverage of Buddhism, one might suggest that the *topoi* the scholar proposes are not essentially Judeo-Christian in origin but merely spiritual. In any case, one cannot deny his main contention—shared by Schultze—that the mainstream media often dip into the same wells as traditional religions. Where Schultze (2005) writes that “religious groups and the media borrow each other's rhetoric” (p. 1), Silk (1995) states that when the media deal with religion, they do so using ideas that are “to varying degrees” derived “from religious sources” (p. 55).

Perhaps the *topos* Silk discusses that is undeniably borrowed from religion is that of “supernatural belief.” The author astutely points out that journalists, as hard bitten empiricists, should be skeptical of anything they cannot see. Yet, when they encounter a story about some paranormal occurrence, they enter their investigation with at least a modicum of credulity. From investigations of the shroud of Turin to reports on apparitions of the Virgin Mary, reporters—according to Silk—are told simply to report what they see (Silk, 1995, p. 130). What the reporters see are people who claim to have supernatural experiences. The journalists, thus, report about those claims. Reinforcing this point, in the final chapter of his book Silk reminds us that in covering stories of natural disaster, journalists routinely encounter interviewees who share their contention that God spared them from death by some miraculous intervention. He notes that, on occasion of an event of this type, the president of a secular national organization, the “Freedom from Religion Foundation,” chided the country's news editors for what the atheist called “bible-belt journalism” (Silk, 1995, p. 140).

Silk provides evidence that the accusation may have some grounds. And, nothing in Schultze's perspective denies that possibility. Both authors agree that the media fully recognize they are immersed in a culture with deep religious roots. Even though the mainstream media have attempted to create a new “metanarrative” or even new “liturgies” (to use terms from Schultze), they still are imbued with content that might be extremely unsettling to those who are adamant that rational 21<sup>st</sup> century people should only speak of what they can clearly see with their own eyes. It is to the “tribal” medium of such a group of people I turn next.

### **The American Humanist Association and *The Humanist***

Though the American Humanist Association was officially founded in 1941, their history goes much deeper. Much of the impetus for the group developed out of the Unitarian church, especially with two clergy from that denomination, John H. Dietrich and Curtis W. Reese (Wilson, 1995, p. 7). The two ministers began sharing their view that the notion of God is “philosophically possible, scientifically unproved and religiously unnecessary” (p. 8). Both men continued to develop their ideas and to find like-minded thinkers, joining with a collection of thirty two other individuals to sign *The Humanist Manifesto* in 1933 (p. 99-100). That document laid out a number of basic propositions of modern humanism, for example that the universe is self-existing, not created, that the “time has passed” for theism and deism, and that people will deal with crises they face in life with “their naturalness and probability” (pp. 97-98). In 1941, the two men changed the “Humanist Press Association,” which had distributed much of the literature from the growing movement, to the “American Humanist Association,” as the group was expanding and involved in much more than publishing.

The organization continues into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, stressing a mission of “progressive social change” but especially change initiated by “humanists and nontheists of all stripes” (American Humanist Association, 2013a). Many in the group like to refer to its core set of beliefs as the “freethought” tradition, and its adherents as “freethinkers.” Currently, the AHA publishes a number of books and occasionally funds media campaigns to share its point of view. They have received significant attention for ad campaigns stressing humanistic alternatives to religion and especially for claims made during the holiday season against the existence of God (Dolak, 2010). Their magazine, *The Humanist*, is a bimonthly publication that the group describes as a “magazine of critical inquiry and social concern that applies humanism to the major issues of today” (American Humanist Association, 2013b). The media kit for the organization lists the periodical's paid circulation as only 15,000, but claims that they have a “growing international readership of more than 60,000” (American Humanist Association, 2013c, p. 2).

### Analyzing Visual Culture in *The Humanist*

The purpose of this investigation was to determine the extent to which *The Humanist* focuses on visual culture. Attempting to follow a pattern similar to that used by Popp, I engaged in a discourse analysis of the publication for a four-year period, from March of 2009 to February of 2013. As Popp (2010) explains, discourse analysis is an attempt to make “the implicit explicit by connecting the key terms, themes, and images that appear throughout a set of texts to a body of tacit knowledge necessary to comprehend those patterns” (p. 503). All editions of the magazine in the range described above were examined in this manner.

I noted earlier that the articles from *Citizen Magazine* could easily be categorized as those that expressed dissatisfaction with visual elements they disagreed with and those that celebrated visual elements they liked. Here, I wish to propose that those categories also work to describe the way *The Humanist* related to visual culture. But, that is not to say a perfect similarity exists between the way this publication and *Citizen* reacted to the seen world. As described below, the first two categories do provide striking correspondence between the two magazines. Even so, there are some areas where the two sets of publications are quite different.

#### *Dissatisfaction with (Godly) Culture*

In ways that were quite similar to *Citizen*, *The Humanist* included a large number of articles that expressed concern about things they could see going on around them. The former, given its strong appeal to its religion-based morality, was very concerned about culture that conflicted with that morality. In the case of *The Humanist*, the overwhelming majority of the articles were in fact concerned with expressions of a religious-based living.

For example in “A bad month for atheists” (Mulligan, 2011), the author discussed a number of examples where notable conservatives had expressed a religious point of view the author found distressing. Television commentator Glenn Beck had recently claimed that Jared Loughner (who killed five people and seriously wounded four others in a Tucson shooting rampage) was motivated by what Beck said was the perpetrator’s atheism. In the same article, the author bemoaned the fact that Bill O’Reilly, also a commentator on Fox News, used his show to argue evidence for the existence of God. Similarly, in “America’s addiction to belief” (Trent, 2010), the author of the article complained of 21<sup>st</sup> century Americans who are willing to believe things that they cannot prove empirically or rationally. This is, he argued, especially the case in the blogosphere and other modern mass media. He compared this disappointing environment to the one that was presented in America’s “secular Constitution,” where, as he views it, the authors chose “to avoid religious language entirely.” To sum up that principle, he stated, “There is a certain irony in the case of the United States; [*sic*] a nation founded on Enlightenment principles of rationality, and now so eagerly becoming a culture of raw, unquestioning belief.”

According to another article, that “unquestioning belief” is especially problematic for African-Americans. In “Black churches and blue-eyed Jesuses,” Sikivu Hutchinson (2012) spoke of portrayal of black religious experience in American cinema and complex faith rituals in the black community. Much of the article focused on her own childhood struggles, raised in a secular household but being surrounded by people of faith, and images of “blue-eyed Jesuses.” She ended her essay with vivid, unpleasant descriptions of contemporary urban environment, warning, “there is God at the precipice, dangling children and fools over the side, manufacturing faith.”

In a rather unusual article that also had a clear religious dimension, *The Humanist* argued against a particular form of visual culture, the modern use of Photoshop. In the case considered, the editing software allowed the erasure of women from a scene. Granados (2011) showed how a White House press photo of the Obama administration conferring about the pursuit of Osama Bin Laden was printed in one Orthodox Jewish publication with Hillary Clinton and one other female blotted from the image. The writer claimed this is largely a symptom of Judaism’s treatment of women and, in the end, suggested that perhaps we should “consign the Torah and the Talmud to the history shelf.”

Some articles expressing concern for religion spoke of visible movements in politics, especially the visibility of the Tea Party and certain media events developed by the religious right. In “Tents or tea,” Sean Faircloth (2012) wrote of how Tea Party members like to dress in American Revolution-era costumes. He contrasted this with the visible style of the Occupy Wall Street movement, especially claiming that the style difference is a manifestation of deeper philosophical differences. In the article he intimated that even though the Tea Party group appears harmless—and

claims to have strong libertarian leanings—it is really supportive of “theocratic policies.” Faircloth argued this is against the trajectory of modern American progress, noting that historical leaders such as Martin Luther King had atheists by their side.

Rather than the absence of atheism, another article expressed concern for the presence of religion in a state-sponsored space. “No license to promote religion” (Boston 2010) emphasized how lawmakers in South Carolina had passed legislation allowing for production of a state auto license plate with a cross superimposed over a stained-glass window and the caption “I believe.” The article explained that a federal judge had already struck down the law permitting creation of mobile religious imagery.

Not every element of visual culture which agitated the writers of *The Humanist* had religious dimensions. Two articles stand out to demonstrate that; both were related to violent imagery and children. One dealt with an Army recruitment strategy that entailed setting up a center in a suburban Philadelphia mall that allowed visiting youths to play video war games (Swanson, 2009). The writer for *The Humanist* expressed concern that teenagers at the site were heard to congratulate each other for having killed “ragheads” and “hajis.”

In stark contrast to the license plate story mentioned earlier, this case had no First Amendment establishment clause implications. Nothing in the government’s action could be construed as respecting a religion. Neither was it abridging people’s rights to speak of, or practice their religion. The article seems to indicate that readers of the magazine might be bothered by the army’s low respect for human life. Or, perhaps the dissatisfaction was with the government’s expenditure on the recruiting strategy. Finally, some might simply be offended by violent video games in themselves.

That last point was revisited in another article on youth and graphic imagery in screen entertainment (Horton, 2011). The topic of the essay was a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision to overturn a California law prohibiting the sale of school-shooting simulators to children without their parents’ permission. The author was troubled by the decision, noting research on the negative effects of violent video games as well as recent cases in which people known to play them engaged in violent behavior. Acknowledging that video games, in general, can have positive impact on young people, the writer claimed that those benefits “do not require gruesome images.”

#### *Satisfaction with (Ungodly) Culture*

While the articles above indicated that the editors of *The Humanist* sometimes scan the visual environment to learn what is available but unworthy of humanists’ praise, there were many articles that did the opposite. All of the articles below demonstrate that the magazine attempts to find visual culture that is positive and direct readers to it. Some of the worthy finds are historical. That is, the magazine wants readers to look back in admiration of them. Others are contemporary. For these, the publication seems to be encouraging a rally of community support.

A good example of the magazine’s historical gaze is a pair of articles related to photographer Lewis Hine. One piece (Lockett, 2011) was largely biographical, explaining how Hine developed an interest in photographing child-laborers and immigrants. The second entry (Perrier, 2011) included biographical elements but also considered the rationale for Hine’s work and its character. For the most part, both articles would seem at home in a general interest magazine. There were subtle elements, however, that revealed the magazine’s desire for a culture devoid of religious constraints. For example, Perrier (2011) noted Hine’s connection to the Ethical Culture School, a progressive institution promoting positive social change with few spiritual dimensions. As Perrier described this, it was a matter of “deed, not creed.”

Other articles were more blatant in their attachment to visual culture that challenged theism. A fine example of this was “The Bible according to Thomas Jefferson” (Carlson, 2012). In reference to a Smithsonian exhibit on copies of scripture owned by Jefferson, the article highlighted the president’s aversion to supernatural aspects of Christianity.

Jefferson preferred to focus on the ethical teachings of Jesus, not miraculous works. To help readers understand this, the magazine showed a copy of one of the Bibles on display, revealing “meticulous excisions,” places where its owner had carefully eliminated passages that offended him.

Of more recent history, but still presented as a pioneer, Judy Norsigian was portrayed as a champion of positive visual culture (Norsigian, 2011). Her book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, published in 1971, was described by the magazine as being a “groundbreaking” work that “offered straightforward and detailed guidance on health and sexuality for women.” Much praised for her daring actions to get a controversial book published, Norsigian is quoted as saying, “Women have always been under threat from conservative forces—especially religious fundamentalist groups—and that threat seems to be increasing now.”

Admittedly, though *Our Bodies Ourselves* had a large number of photographs, it was still a book. Other articles in *The Humanist* investigated media that are much more image-based, such as television. Doing so without wandering from the present theme of positive ungodly culture of the 1960s and 70s, in “Star Trek made me an atheist,” Nick Farrantello (2009) reminisced about how the science fiction television program opened up a whole new world of questions for him. The Enterprise and Captain Kirk encountered a plethora of extraterrestrial characters. Farrantello claimed the show’s constant debunking of the powerful among those made him realize that authority figures who act unethically deserve none of our allegiance. Having watched the television series and wrestled with questions of theodicy (though he does not use the term), the author suggested he began to question basic Judaic and Christian dogma. He explained this in style a Trekkie would appreciate:

If there was a God, some being causing earthquakes and hurling hurricanes, why wouldn’t Christians (or Jews or Muslims for that matter) fight against such a being? What I was learning on *Star Trek* seemed more moral to me than what I was learning in church. As I got older and learned more about suffering around the world, the more I wondered why religious people didn’t oppose such a cruel God. These holy men should be up in arms, I thought. If they were faithful *Star Trek* watchers, they would be trying to build some sort of giant phaser to take him out. (Farrantello, 2009)

The author ended on a more positive note, saying the show also communicated that even though he is a speck of dust in the universe, he has control over his future.

Moving to a different medium and traversing from the 1960s to the present, the same author contributed to the magazine again with an article on ten classic films that should appeal to humanists (Farrantello, 2011b, July/August). He emphasized that freethinkers need to be aware of films that express their values. Specifically, good motion pictures should “reject religion and supernaturalism, even peripherally,” and instead should “uphold the ideals of reason, ethics, and justice.” Given these criteria, Farrantello recommended a range of products from serious historical drama such as *Amadeus* and *Schindler’s List* to comedies like *Harold and Maude* and *Life of Brian*.

Farrantello (2011a) had one other film-related essay in this three-year period, a piece on the first ever “Freethought Film Festival.” Andrea Steele, the founder of the event, was interviewed to help readers understand what motivated her to create it. Steele noted that one of her goals was “to change the stereotypes of nonbelievers and to elevate science and inquiry in lieu of superstition and pseudoscience.” Along those lines, many of the festival screenings were works that question religion. For example, *The God Complex* was described as a spoof of Bible stories. The writer admitted it might not be well-received by some audiences and warned that it is really most appropriate for those who appreciate “gratuitous blasphemy.”

Helping its readers understand visual cues for agnosticism, but not in human products, another set of articles found an odd location to discuss visual culture. Two pieces invited subscribers to ask how the natural environment could be a source of humanistic enlightenment. In “All is calm, all is bright,” Shannon Odelberg (2011) discussed the joys of spending Christmas Eve at Arches National Park. “As Christians around the world celebrate the mythical virgin birth of their messiah,” he wrote, “I have chosen to celebrate the grandeur of nature.” He vividly described such grandeur, and shared photos thereof, explaining how seeing the immensity of the landscape and sky made him realize his insignificance, but also that evolution conspired to bring him to this moment.

Also on the topic of evolution, another article used the natural world to help readers of *The Humanist* understand a better strategy for arguing with their creationist opponents. Clay Farris Naff (2009) described how taking people to the wilderness of Wyoming is a great way to get them to abandon their attachment to theistic views of the cosmos. He said that in typical disputes, things get obfuscated. Thus, humanists should “quit trying to win over young people with words.” Clearly that indicates that the author believes visual cues can often be more powerful than verbal ones.

One odd recent feature of the magazine was an appropriate conclusion for a discussion of its affinity for “ungodly” visual culture. A 2012 edition included a “Humanist photo contest,” wherein readers had been invited to take copies of their magazine, “near and far” (Humanist photo contest winners, 2012). More pointedly, the magazine said it hoped contest entrants would take photos of themselves with their magazines and then leave some copies behind, “for unwitting humanists to peruse.” The first-place winner was a photo of a woman reading a copy of the magazine in front of the Mormon Temple in Salt Lake City.

### *Uncertainty over Culture*

Most of *The Humanist* articles discussed above lent themselves rather easily to classification. They either expressed disdain for something the editors thought unworthy of allegiance, or championed things freethinkers should be reading, watching, or otherwise observing. A handful of articles did not fit into either of these categories, because the magazine expressed a very conflicted view on their subject matter.

Several articles struggled with issues related to sexuality. In all cases, writers seemed to recognize a clash of values. For example, the magazine had an interview with Nina Hartley, who it listed as having acted in “over 600 adult films” (Shaffer, 2010). The article did not delve much into the films themselves and their worthiness as cultural fare for freethinkers. Instead, it addressed Hartley’s own freethought approach to religion and social matters, as well as the broader issue of whether pornography is demeaning to women.

In the same issue of the magazine, another column reviewed the way humanists have attempted to reach consensus on the issue of pornography over the years. Melissa Bollman (2010) noted that the magazine first published an article on the subject over forty years earlier. Little has been settled in that time, though. The author ended the essay with a claim that “humanists must answer for themselves,” suggesting that this is a topic on which finding a clear perspective from broader humanist culture is elusive.

Similarly, the magazine struggled greatly with the issue of burqa bans that had been under discussion in some European countries. One author (Braasch, 2010), writing from France—where much of the controversy related to women’s headscarves had raged—wrote forcefully in favor of statutes that limit the right of women to wear the burqa and the niqab. These vestments, according to the author, obscure women’s identities in a way that renders them powerless. Contrary to this interpretation, another author (Knief, 2010) claimed ban proponents do not recognize the freedom that women have in choosing to wear or not wear the garment. She likened the issue to that discussed in the previous paragraph of this study, suggesting that this is a matter of how women express their sexuality. As women should be free to create pornography, according to the author, they should be equally free to cover their bodies. Providing a middle ground, albeit a confusing one, Leach (2010) wrote:

“Therefore, the veil must eventually go if Muslim women are to achieve equality. Their gender equality, however, can’t come at the cost of their further victimization as ethnic minorities.”

Striking a balance (or, simply avoiding either extreme), a fourth author provided no clear indication as to whether burqa bans should be encouraged or discouraged by humanists. Katrina Voss (2010) mainly focused on a claim that the desire to cover or expose women’s bodies is a product of human evolution. The basic fact, the writer argued, is that “men take pleasure in gazing upon women’s bodies.” But, of course, that fact gives us no inclination as to whether such is a good or a bad thing; neither does it decide the extent to which government should regulate religious clothing. On that matter, the editor of the magazine admitted there is “no consensus” (Bardi, 2010).

## Discussion

Do liberal secular groups show strong concern for visual culture, exhibiting care for what they see and what might be seen by others? The answer appears to be yes. In the case of *The Humanist*, a liberal secular group often wrote of the visible world around them. In the following pages, I wish to address some similarities and differences between the manner in which this publication and *Citizen* dealt with the seen world. And, in doing so, I wish to entertain some questions that might be worthy of future consideration.

Before engaging in this more detailed discussion, however, I wish to anticipate a potential problem. The analysis above revealed that humanists (many of whom appear to consider themselves agnostics) are concerned with visual culture, given their discussion of books, movies, video games, even the seen environment at national parks. Are all of these items good representatives of “visual culture”? And, given that question, does the inquiry above consider “visual culture” more broadly than did Popp in his original analysis? The answer to these questions is far from simple, due to the lack of clarity in the original research about *Citizen* magazine. The terms used to define “visual culture” in that study were presented earlier in this essay. None of them would exclude the items from *The Humanist* that were considered here. In the section of the original research in which the scholar described his method, he simply stated that he focused on 65 articles that “explicitly addressed the role of imagery in U.S. culture” (Popp, 2012, p. 504). Exactly what entails “imagery” was left to the reader’s discretion. So, the question remains. Do books—especially books such as *Our Bodies Ourselves* that include photographs—represent a form of “imagery”? Do video games? How about the way people dress during a protest rally? And, is the natural world in national forests and parks “imagery”? Are these the kind of “visual culture” we should be comparing to the content of *Citizen*?

There are two immediate issues worthy of deeper inquiry. One issue is that Berger, whose *Ways of Seeing* Popp cited as an important precursor to his own work, focused primarily on painting, photography, and other graphic art forms. Some of his attention in the book is to advertising, but it is advertising that includes photographs or other graphic representations. The second issue is that even Popp appears to have gone beyond boundaries Berger imposed. He discussed many articles in which *Citizen* expressed concern for culture that was visual, but not image-based (if we take “image” to mean a photographic or artistic two-dimensional rendering, as Berger does). For example, Popp alluded to the magazine’s concerns for words on Starbucks’ coffee cups, for t-shirts expressing views on abortion, for a ban on little green army men, and for the state’s desire to remove copies of the Ten Commandments. None of these instances of “visual culture” would be examples of “ways of seeing” in Berger’s book. The question, then, is where to limit the scope of “visual culture.”

Complicating matters even more, *The Humanist* included articles that expressed concern for “visual culture” outside the realm of graphic arts and even outside the realm of toys, statues, and the printed word. Toys, statues, and books are, after all, human products, even if one would not deem them “visual.” Some articles in *The Humanist* had to do with agnostics’ attempts to make sense of the natural environment. None of this discussion would be found in *Ways of Seeing*. Yet, when Popp defines visual culture as “the practices of constructing, seeing, and making sense of visual environments,” the only problematic term is “constructing.” Given the rest of the definition, analysis of articles about promoting humanism through our perception of the natural environment seems wholly appropos. And, very little of Popp’s discussion has to do with “constructing” visual culture.<sup>6</sup>

Related to this, as will be discussed below, Popp seems especially concerned with “public space” in his analysis. Nowhere, however, does he explicitly state that his research was limited to discussion of “visual imagery” only when it is in “public space.” Neither does he clearly define what is, or is not, “public space.” Presumably a courthouse is a public space, and, analysis of how a group tries to direct our viewing in that venue should be important. Nowhere, however, does Popp provide clarification of what constitutes “private” space and its relationship to visual culture. Are the coffee shops where Starbucks distributes cups with quotations on them a public space, or a private one? Assuming the latter, and taking the issue to the next level, would the propensity of a group to direct our gaze in such private space be more “draconian” (the word Popp used to describe *Citizen*’s communication) than if the group directed our gaze in a public space? Are one group’s obvious attempts to argue its case for how we should see public space really more “authoritarian” (another word used) than a similar group’s attempts to tell us what to think of visual elements in private space? These are questions that seem unanswered, and certainly worthy of further discussion. One would think such discussion needs to begin at the conceptual and methodological level, not at the level of specific content analysis.

Meanwhile, there are areas where discussion of specific content from the analysis above is clearly possible. To begin, a recap might be in order, providing a reminder of what aspects of “visual culture” *The Humanist* found worthy of addressing with its audience. Those were:

- An article about images of the “blue-eyed Jesus” in churches and other public settings.
- Two articles that discussed the problem of theological discussion on television.
- One article about the use of Photoshop to impose a religious view of the world.
- One article about the visual tactics of the Tea Party in contrast to the Occupy Wall Street movement.
- One article about an early feminist graphic book.
- Two articles about a photographer from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.
- One article about automobile license plates.
- Two articles about violent video games, one specifically related to the presence of those games at a military recruitment center in a shopping mall.
- One article about a museum exhibit related to Thomas Jefferson’s attitude toward the Bible.
- One article about a television series.
- Two articles about motion pictures.
- Two articles about using the natural environment (e.g., national parks) to communicate about humanism.
- One article about a photo contest that encouraged readers to take copies of the magazine into public spaces and share the image with others.
- Two articles about pornography.
- Four articles about how humanists should react to religious dress in public spaces.

In very broad terms, one can make a strong argument that the liberal agnostic group studied here showed concern for the seen world in ways very similar to how the conservative Christian group studied earlier did. To provide a few simple comparisons:

- The conservative Christian group expressed concern over ideas that were shared on Starbucks’ coffee cups—The liberal agnostic group expressed concern over ideas shared by commentators on television.
- The conservative Christian group expressed concern over the removal of crosses and images of Jesus —The liberal agnostic group expressed concern over the *presence* of crosses and images of Jesus.
- The conservative Christian group expressed concern over the removal of army toys from a public school —The liberal agnostic group expressed concern over teens pretending to be army men in a video game at a military recruiting center.
- The conservative Christian group expressed concern over uncovered sexual imagery on magazine covers and tramp Barbie dolls—The liberal agnostic group expressed concern over burqas and other ways of covering women’s bodies.

These are just a few relationships. And, as admitted, they are quite simplistic. To move to deeper levels of understanding, I wish to question the extent to which some of these pairings may or may not be heuristic.

One way in which the pairings are accurate is that they do indicate that both Focus on the Family and The American Humanist Association truly are concerned with visual culture and how it reflects the strength of their respective ideologies in contemporary American society. Popp (2010, p. 499) suggests that *Citizen* urged its readers “to look at the appearance of public space through the prism of cultural struggle, a terrain fought over by fundamentalist Christian groups and their secular-liberal opponents.” I argue that the material above makes the statement just as applicable to *The Humanist* as it is to *Citizen*. One change in wording might be advisable. I will address that minor change later. For now though, we should stress that both magazines clearly indicated they perceive themselves to be in the midst of a “cultural struggle.”

Indeed, the most obvious, undeniable finding of the analysis above is the fact that the liberal humanist magazine expressed consternation with religious culture just as the conservative Christian magazine did with secular culture. The former sees religion as an intruder in a world where it need not exist, and truly wishes it would disappear. The latter sees religion as a vital feature of human experience, and is greatly concerned when secularists make any effort to limit its presence and power.

As the analysis of both magazines has been qualitative, not quantitative, one cannot make claims about which magazine expresses the *most* concern for the presence of the other’s metaphysical point of view, or lack thereof. Worth noting, though, is the large number of stories from each that clearly expressed concern over how their readers make sense of the visual world around them. More careful quantitative analyses could be useful.

Meanwhile, the qualitative investigation initiated here clearly made manifest the competition—to put it in pleasant terms—that exists between theists and humanists who attempt to use a medium to appeal to their audiences. And, in a tribal media environment, this makes sense. As noted above, material from Schultze and Silk suggests that the mainstream media system is neither purely Christian, nor purely secular. Instead, it is vaguely spiritual, avoiding clear references to the religious tenets Focus would like it to, but relying on religion far more than the AHA would prefer. In such an environment, the middle ground is contested terrain, and the two tribal groups who feel they do not have desired control over it will always be fighting. Constant references by *Humanist* writers to the offensive nature of religion and religionists should make this clear. And thus, one would be misguided to think that *Citizen* magazine is unique in its attempts to persuade their readers of the dangers of the “cultural struggle” around them.

This “cultural struggle” is a clearly a religious one. And, ironically, humanism might need to be included in discussion of contemporary religious movements, given its tendency to follow patterns other faiths do. Popp, relying on the work of Morgan (2005), suggested that there are activities often observed when religion interacts with visual culture. His grouping of those into six categories was presented early in this paper. At this point, they can be repeated, but with slight changes in wording, to demonstrate their applicability to humanism as much as to Christianity. The summary is that humanistic visual culture: 1) tries to *erase* boundaries between the sacred and profane; 2) leads viewers to interpret things from a *secular* framework; 3) can be a means of *ignoring* a deity; 4) suggests the need to act *without regard* to religion; 5) connects *non-believers* across time and place; and 6) can be used to displace imagery of *all religions*.<sup>7</sup> Simply stated, the material studied here does not seem to support the idea that religious groups are attuned to the six activities above more than anti-religious groups are. Moreover, it seems to indicate that if one defines Focus on the Family as “conservative” because of their firm adherence to certain traditional views, the American Humanist Association also exhibits some of that “conservatism,” even if the term is not typically used in that way. They clearly wish to develop some form of tradition, consistently claiming that great people in history (Thomas Jefferson, Lewis Hine, Martin Luther King) were champions of the ideas that they hold dear. In addition, the AHA’s steadfast defense of its rejection of deity has all the zeal of conservative “religion,” even though its religion is disdain for the idea of deity.

One place where a difference between *Citizen* and *The Humanist* might be observable, on the other hand, is in relation to “public space.” This was a topic introduced earlier in conceptual form, but deserving of more attention in relation to specific content now. Popp claimed *Citizen* directed its readers to look at “public space” through a lens that saw it as a key area of cultural struggle. Whereas Popp encountered a very large number of articles in *Citizen* that expressed concern for government buildings, parks, and other spaces, *The Humanist* showed little indication of this. Perhaps

there is a legitimate difference between the two organizations in this area, and it is worthy of further consideration. Given the state of the cultural struggle, one would expect that both groups would be concerned with physical environments as much as with mediated ones.

Alternatively, though, Popp's analysis might present an anomaly in *Citizen's* coverage. Perhaps the amount of attention typically devoted to this issue is not as great as it appeared at the time of Popp's data gathering. Along those lines, we might note that the nearly two dozen stories he referenced on the Decalogue were almost all in regard to a particular case, an Alabama judge's attempts to keep a copy of the commandments in his local courthouse. Certainly *Citizen* was very attached to that story in the four year period Popp examined. But, many news organizations were equally fascinated by the conflict of that story. During the period of Popp's sample, *The New York Times* devoted thirty four reports to the Alabama case.<sup>8</sup> Focus on the Family's attention to this specific event may have caused an uncharacteristic spike in coverage of this type of issue. Further research is warranted to determine if the disparity in coverage is constant.

Another area where some difference between the two publications appears to exist is in the balance between their focus on positive and negative cultural elements. The list of articles Popp reveals from the analysis of *Citizen* seems to indicate that the magazine expended significant ink to discuss culture it found unsavory, but only a small amount to direct readers to uplifting culture. And, much of what it expressed as positive appears to have been historical (e.g., government buildings with religious dimensions). In contrast to this, *The Humanist* eagerly told its readers of books, television programs, and films that they should be experiencing.

One explanation for this might be the place *Citizen* holds in the array of magazines that Focus produces. Other Focus publications such as *Thriving Family* do appear to offer readers guidance on interpreting popular culture such as books and motion pictures. Quite possibly, having that venue available for directing their readers to quality culture, the organization feels that *Citizen* can attune itself to politics outside the realm of mass media.

A final area where there appears to be some difference between Christians and agnostics is in the amount of unanimity expressed in the anti-religious publication. *The Humanist*, though exhibiting certainty on particular political and social issues (such as the presence of religious imagery in public spaces), is quite equivocal on others (such as video violence and pornography). Again, if this difference is representative, and not a factor of specific period selected for study or a factor of interpretation, it is worthy of further thought. Quite possibly, the issue may relate to the variety of tribal media available to those with a strongly theistic worldview. Given that such a large part of the American population still believes in God (Newport, 2011), a tribal magazine from a theistic perspective might realize it is able to find a particular niche in the submarket. Specifically, *Citizen* may feel more comfortable taking a clear stand on many moral and social issues, realizing that it can thus appeal to its particular subgroup, allowing *Sojourners* (for example) to appeal to theists with a different view. *Sojourners* reaches a decidedly different audience, using the slogan, "Faith in Action for Social Justice." Interestingly, both of these publications stand in contrast, to a degree, with *Christianity Today*. The latter is more mainstream than the other two. It is still tribal, though, in its openly evangelical attention to Christianity and culture. Worth pointing out is that its circulation is 120,000 (*Christianity Today*, 2013), almost three times that of *Citizen*. This raises the interesting question of whether there are tribes and "sub-tribes." Might some readers of one of the smaller publications, also subscribe to the larger one?<sup>9</sup>

This discussion of circulations does allow for a slight detour into a topic that has been given little attention thus far. When looked at within the frame of the previous paragraph, we might begin to wonder whether periodicals such as *Citizen* and *The Humanist* have much power at all. This is a question that probably deserves quantitative audience research, not qualitative content analysis, but it seems crucial. Popp paints a picture of Focus that might lead some to think it is a behemoth on the American political scene. Though space does not permit such, further analysis of that organization--and American Humanist Association as well—is warranted. In his research, Popp (2010) hinted that Focus lost some of its power since 2005. He did so vaguely, though, suggesting that by 2006 "the conservative movement had lost much of its momentum" (p. 504). The quoted words were in reference to the general political movement, not Focus as a specific organizational body. In actuality, Focus on the Family has seen significant decline in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The number of people employed by the ministry has dropped significantly since reaching its zenith in 2002, now standing at only 640 (Heilman, 2013). And, where Popp (2010, p. 501) noted that Focus once published ten magazines, the number has now dwindled to four.<sup>10</sup> Some of this might simply reflect the business cutbacks of the

great recession. Even so, scholars and other observers might have overestimated Focus on the Family's strength. The subtitle of a 2007 book by one prominent culture observer, *How James Dobson, Focus on the Family, and Evangelical America are Winning the Culture War*, might seem odd to those who encounter it today.

The information here might suggest that Focus on the Family and its media, rather than culture war victors, are becoming one more medium generally outside the mainstream. They are a tribal voice in a complex, multifaceted media environment. It, *Sojourners* and *The Humanist* are all competitors speaking with megaphones, while the corporate media use loudspeakers. These smaller entities wish to share their tribal rhetoric with those who, due to peculiar views that distinguish them from the mass audience, seek something beyond *Reader's Digest*, *Time* or *Good Housekeeping*. One scholar of religion aptly describes the target demographic of the latter group of publications as "the large cultural and religious middle," and suggests the views of these audience members are not "clearly crystalized" (Roof, 1999, p. 6). Regarding the communication to woo a constituency from the middle, or maintain one that has already been attracted, Schultze (2005) paints "tribal rhetoric" not as "false talk or ideological jargon" but as the way a tribe attempts to "interpret their world, to build and share those interpretations with others, and sometimes to persuade outsiders to agree with tribal or mainstream beliefs" (p. 9). Popp, with a more sinister view of Focus on the Family's tribal communication writes:

"In this regard, *Citizen* illustrated how the lines between media and space become porous when manners of interpreting everyday life are cultivated through media texts. These ways of making sense of experience eventually become naturalized, unreflexingly guiding how individuals build the worlds around them." (512)

Given such a view, Popp is very skeptical of *Citizen* and sees it as controlling its readers in "draconian" (p. 513) ways. In contrast, the current study suggests that much of the content Popp found in *Citizen* can be found in *The Humanist*, and that its readers might be controlled in nearly identical manner.

I might note how *The Humanist*, as one example of that, encouraged readers to take the publication with them into the world. Presumably, that is so regular readers can use it as a humanistic lens for understanding their environment. A more explicit element of this was explained by the editorial staff, though. They said that one goal was to get regular readers to leave copies in public spaces so that "unwitting humanists" (Humanist photo contest winners, 2012) might find it. Proselytization appears to be more than just a theistic activity.

Drawing the similarities between the two groups more carefully, then, I might suggest a revisiting of the following excerpt from Popp's (2010) description of *Citizen*.

"The magazine repeatedly argued that public imagery...shapes culture. It instructed readers on how to survey public space and discern what a righteous society looks like versus what an unrighteous society looks like and tutored readers on how to see religious imagery as a patriotic bond through time, bridging the present to a more devoutly-religious past." (pp. 512-513)

With changing only five words, this statement might very well describe *The Humanist*.

"The magazine repeatedly argued that public imagery...shapes culture. It instructed readers on how to survey public space and discern what a *healthy* society looks like versus what an *unhealthy* society looks like and tutored readers on how to see *secular* imagery as a patriotic bond through time, bridging the present to a more *rational secular* past."

This comparison might seem overdrawn, but the material studied here supports it. *The Humanist* spent many of its pages engaging in the acts described in Popp's quotation. All of those acts were intended to steer readers toward a worldview the magazine endorsed, and away from one it did not.

The comments shared above fall in line neatly with other observations provided earlier. As noted at the beginning of this investigation, "visual culture" entails a power dynamic at numerous levels. Many—though not all—of the images that *Citizen* and *The Humanist* advised their readers to see in particular ways were truly "images" in the sense John Berger (1991) has used the term. They were not naturally occurring phenomena.

Rather, they were already imbued with “ways of seeing” (p. 10). That is to say, those who created the images—whether the image be little green army men, Starbucks coffee cups, paintings of Christ, or license plates—had already initiated the power dynamic. As Berger points out, “every image embodies a way of seeing” (p. 10). In Popp’s analysis of *Citizen*, and my analysis of *The Humanist*, we find the second layer of that power dynamic. It occurs when tribes of citizens try to communicate internally about how to best make sense of the many images surrounding them in this complex mediated world. Sometimes, the tribe’s attempt to make sense of an image contradicts the “way of seeing” that the creator of the image might have instilled in it.<sup>11</sup>

Popp’s analysis focuses strictly on the second power dynamic. One would have to look elsewhere to see analysis of the power Starbucks has to put quotations on coffee cups or the power *Cosmopolitan* magazine has to position images and text before the eyes of millions of people in grocery store lines. The point of the preceding pages is that disenfranchised tribes, sensing their values to be under attack by many images created in their society, do not think of their reactions to those images as draconian. They are simply providing layers of protection from visual culture they do not perceive to be salubrious (and, encouragement to attune to visual culture that is). They do this primarily for those who have chosen to associate with the tribe; they hope that members of the larger culture will take their advice.

Perhaps, then, the term “visual culture” should be broadened, as I have done here, to encompass *anything* visual, the interpretation of which various tribes could disagree. At times, Popp seems to see the concept this way. For example, he uses terms like the “seen environment” (2010, p. 511). If we are interested in the power dynamics of how competing tribes attempt to interpret their observable world, all aspects that can be observed should be worthy of our scholarly attention. That is a key point I make here.

But, another key point I make is that Focus might not be unique in its concern for the many visual cues they perceive in the world. They may place “a premium” (Popp, 2010, p. 511) on that visual environment. But, perhaps other groups do as well. If other groups do, Popp might be overstating the case that Focus represents the “apotheosis of this authoritarian ideology” (p. 511).

In closing, we should note that the material above shows questions of religion and visual culture are not as simple as one might think. Popp’s thesis claims there is some hierarchy in which conservative Christians are much more concerned about the images that circulate in our culture than are other groups. Scholars such as Schultze and Silk—who have thought very carefully about contemporary religion and its relation to media—indicate that groups claiming to be wholly secular might be very worried about the seen world, maybe even as much as their theologically-inclined counterparts are.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Popp (2010) does provide a thorough discussion of the “conservative” nature of Focus on the Family, alluding to “conservative policy issues” (p. 502) and “issues that Focus believes conservative Christians should pay attention to” (p. 502). The researcher follows a similar pattern with “Christian,” not defining it, but giving examples of Focus of the Family’s notion of Christian heritage and Christian politics.

<sup>2</sup> Many of these numbers changed from the time of these publications to the time of Popp’s study, and have continued to change since. More information on this is provided in the discussion section of this paper.

<sup>3</sup> As Popp notes, *Citizen* is one of several magazines from Focus on the Family. The organization labels *Citizen* as a publication to “set the record straight on the issues that affect your family, your community and your church” (Focus on the Family, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> At the time of Popp’s study, *Citizen* was published ten times annually.

<sup>5</sup> The exact number of stories is difficult to determine, based on the text of Popp’s analysis.

<sup>6</sup> Which, as is discussed elsewhere in this paper, is the first stage in a two-part power dynamic. The focus here is consistently on the second stage.

<sup>7</sup> I am tempted to use the wording “*all other religions*” here, in line with earlier comments about humanism’s religious tendencies. One might—with humor, but insight also—make the claim that the god of humanism is a jealous god.

<sup>8</sup> The number provided here was obtained by doing a search in the Ebsco National Newspapers database.

<sup>9</sup> Also notable is the fact that there is so much competition among publications whose editorial content is attuned to the role of God in people’s lives and so few publications that openly devote editorial content to the proposition that we can know nothing about God. In the early 21<sup>st</sup> century there are certainly more publications in the former category than the latter.

<sup>10</sup> The remaining publications are *Thriving Family*, *Clubhouse*, *Clubhouse Jr.*, and *Citizen*.

<sup>11</sup> This issue too, raises significant questions about *The Humanist’s* inclusion of articles that used naturally occurring images (e.g., geological formations, the solar system) as talking points for agnosticism. The two- staged power dynamic discussed here assumes that in all cases there is an original communicator who creates an image and then a second communicator who tries to get his/her audience to look at the image a different way. Clearly the agnostics studied here would say that in the case of natural phenomena such as Arches National Park, there is no initial communicator involved. Should *Citizen* magazine do a story on this topic, however, the editors would presumably argue that there is a first order communicator and that their interpretation of the original message is quite in line with the original communicator’s intent.

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