Introduction to the Special Issue:
Film, Television and the Body

About the Guest Editor

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When we think about body and film or television, our first thoughts probably revolve around body images, the propagation of unhealthy body ideals, make over shows, or the objectification of (more or less) naked female bodies. Many seem to agree that (unhealthy) bodies on-screen affect bodies in front of the screen. What we often tend to neglect, however, are the rich and diverse ways in which bodies on-screen and in front of the screen interact, or in other words how on-screen, off-screen, imaginary, and conceptualized bodies are entangled with each other.

Brent S. Plate argues that “[f]ilms create worlds. They do not passively mimic or directly display what is ‘out there,’ but actively reshape elements of the lived world
and twist them in new ways that are projected on screen and given over to an audience” (Plate, 2005, p.1). Drawing on Plate, one could argue that film and television do not only create worlds but create, stage, and shape bodies. To put it provocatively and to rephrase Plate’s quote one could argue the following: film and television do not only create bodies but they create us as bodies. They do not passively mimic or directly display bodies that are out there, real bodies, imagined bodies, the bodies of the audience, but actively reshape (elements) of lived bodies and twist, stir, re-work, re-think, and re-do bodies in new ways that are projected on screen and given over to an audience. Doing so, taking bodies, twisting them, and giving them over to an audience, screens create (us as) bodies. Plate’s quote helps us to see that what happens on screen is not limited to the immediate experience of what is being screened, but by giving something, e.g. bodies, over to an audience, screens can become part of and shape the audience’s lived experience and contribute to the process of creating worlds.

The papers in this special issue aim to address some of these complex processes and relationships between bodies, screens, us as embodied audience, and religious narratives and practices. They show that representations of bodies are never just that, i.e. mere representations of bodies, ideas, or stereotypes. Representations actively contribute to the transformation of bodies and bodily and religious practices, or better: bodily practice as religious practice and religious practice as bodily practice. Bodies, then, are not static but practised and as such always also entangled with questions and practices of power, governance, and subversion. As the articles in this volume show, representations of bodies always need to be understood from the perspective of bodies as practice.

In the introduction to his *The Body and Society*, Peter Brown discusses several examples and ways in which “societies can lay their codes across the body” (1988). Religions and media, too, lay their codes across bodies. But they are also one of the ways to question, subvert, critique, and transform these codes. Religious symbols are part of this repertoire of codes that can be laid across bodies, but as a “queer” collection of codes they always also escape easy interpretation. Bodies as practice,