

Rel 391: Religion and Materiality

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Friday 1:30-4:00
Westbrook 0011
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Description and Rationale

This course examines the role of things, material practices, the body, space and performance in the study of religions. Materiality is not understood as an “expression” of ideas, beliefs, or theological doctrines, but as the felt-life of a religion and as the actual basis of beliefs. Beginning with the assumption that religion is grounded in the body as the matrix of human experience, this course argues that however much religions may militate against the body, the study of religion must recognize the primary importance of such embodied media as feeling, emotion, sensation, and perception. Belief depends on such faculty as intuition, imagination, and discernment as much as (if not more than) on ideas and rational thinking. Moreover, religion is in need of a thorough materializing in order to be understood as involving far more of a human being than the will imposing itself on the submissive mind and body. How to study this is the problem that the course pursues in five domains of inquiry: sensation, things, body, space, and practice/performance. By focusing on a variety of methods and religious traditions in the present and the past, the aim is to sketch out a broad materialization of Religious Studies.

Requirements and Evaluation

Students will participate robustly in class, doing all readings and engaging in open discussion. Each reading will have a designated discussion leader. Four written assignments consist of a paper on the material analysis of an object; an analysis of a material practice; a critical assessment of materiality in the student’s area of special interest; and a set of definitions of key terms (see below) within the field of religion and material culture. Also required is an oral presentation to class members of the third paper. The final grade will be based on each of these criteria: 15% participation and class leadership; 10% oral presentation; 75% written assignments. Written assignments must be turned in during class on the date listed when due. Papers will be assessed a penalty when late. Incompletes are not allowed except in cases involving serious medical issues. Under no circumstances will an ‘Incomplete’ be granted to anyone who has otherwise failed to hand in assignments on time.

Required Texts

David Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2005

David Morgan, ed., *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief*. London: Routledge, 2009

All other texts are posted on Blackboard

Written Assignments

- No. 1 Material analysis of an object (four pages). Due in class on February 5
- No. 2 Analysis of a material practice (five pages). Due in class on March 5
- No. 3 Critical assessment of materiality in student's area of interest (seven pages).
Due in class on April 2
- No. 4 Key terms in religion & material culture (eight pages) Due in class on April 23

List of Key Terms

These terms will comprise the list of brief definitions for the final paper. Each word should be defined at a length of approximately 150 words. Students may organize or cluster the terms in their papers as they see fit. They should include two or three additional terms that they consider important. The rationale for their additions should be stated in an introduction to the essay. Terms: body, display, sacred, matter, thing, material culture, sensation, emotion, feeling, aesthetic, practice, performance, space. Total length: approximately 2,300 words.

Schedule of Readings and Class Discussions

1. Material Analysis of the Object (1/15)
 - Morgan, "Introduction: The Matter of Belief," in *Religion and Material Culture*
 - Zimmerman, "Workmanship as Evidence"
2. Material Analysis, continued (1/22)
 - Prown, "Style as Evidence"
 - Lewis-Williams, *Cosmos in Stone*, 15-28; Dowson, "Rock Art"
 - Morgan, "Painting as Visual Evidence"
3. Sensation (1/29)
 - Corbin, "Charting the Cultural History of the Senses," in *Howes*
 - Classen, "McLuhan in the Rainforest," in *Howes*
 - Kondo, "The Way of Tea," in *Howes*
 - Drobnik, "Volatile Effects," in *Howes*
 - Nooter-Roberts, "Tactility and Transcendence"
4. Things (2/5) Paper due
 - Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things*, 1-54
 - Brown, "Thing Theory"
 - Daniels, "The Material Culture of Japanese Domesticity"
 - Hermkens, "Clothing as Embodied Experience of Belief"
5. Things in Circulation and Use (2/12)
 - Kopytoff, "The Cultural Biography of Things"
 - Geary, "Sacred Commodities"
 - Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions*, 23-43
 - Roberts, "Re-Signification and the Migration of Images"

6. Body: Theoretical Approaches (2/19)

Mauss, "Techniques of the Body"

Merleau-Ponty, Phenomenology of Perception, 235-82

Strathern, Body Thoughts, 9-39

Blackman, "Lived Bodies"

7. Body in Practice (2/26)

Geurts, "Consciousness as 'Feeling in the Body,'" in Howes

DeRogatis, "Born Again Is a Sexual Term"

Harrington, "The Feeling of Buddhahood"

Morgan, "The Look of the Sacred"

8. Space and Place (3/5) Paper due

Feld, "Places Sensed, Senses Placed," in Howes

Rainey, "Hallowed Grounds and Rituals of Remembrance"

Upton, "Seen, Unseen, and Scene"

Tilley, "Space, Place, Landscape and Perception"

Cho, "Materializing Ancestor Spirits"

9. Sacred Space (3/19)

Cousineau, "The Urban Practice of Jewish Space"

Yi Fu Tuan, "Sacred Space"

Ovsyannikov and Terebikhin, "Sacred Space in the Culture of the Arctic"

Upton, "Spaces," in Holy Things and Profane

10. Performance in Theory (3/26)

Goffman, The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life, 1-76

Turner, "The Anthropology of Performance"

Prasad, excerpts from Poetics of Conduct

11. Performance in Practice (4/2) Paper due

Kanafani, "Rites of Hospitality"; Waterbury, "Islam and Hajj Brahim's World";

Jansen, "An American Woman on the Hajj"; Canfield, "New Year's Day at Ali's

Shrine"; Betteridge, "Women and Shrines in Shiraz," in Everyday Life in the

Muslim Middle East

McGregor, "Dressing the Ka'ba from Cairo"

Mitchell, "Performing Statues"

12. Aesthetics (4/9)

Patterson, The Senses of Touch, 1-35

Meyer and Verrips, "Aesthetics"

Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, Meaning of Things, 173-96

Morgan, "The Practice of Visual Piety"

13. Defining Material Culture (4/16)

Schlereth, "Material Culture and Cultural Research"

Prown, "Mind in Matter"
 Buchli, "Introduction"
 "Visual Culture and Material Culture: Paradigms for the Study of Religion,"
 in Material Religion
 Morgan, "Materiality, Social Analysis, and the Study of Religions," in Morgan,
 ed., Religion and Material Culture

14. Class Presentations (4/23) Paper due

Bibliography of Readings

Appadurai, Arjun, ed. *The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Betteridge, Anne H. "Women and Shrines in Shiraz," 239-47, in Bowen and Early, eds., *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*.

Blackman, Lisa. "Lived Bodies," pp. 83-103, in *The Body: The Key Concepts*. Oxford: Berg, 2008.

Bowen, Donna Lee, and Evelyn A. Early, eds. *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993.

Brown, Bill. "Thing Theory," *Critical Inquiry* 28, no. 1 (Autumn 2001): 1-22.

Buchli, Victor, "Introduction," pp. 1-22, in Victor Buchli, ed., *The Material Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2002.

Canfield, Robert L. "New Year's Day at Ali's Shrine," pp. 234-238, in Bowen and Early, eds., *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*.

Cho, Insoo. "Materializing Ancestor Spirits: Name Tablets, Portraits, and Tombs in Korea," in Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture*.

Classen, Constance. "McLuhan in the Rainforest: The Sensory Worlds of Oral Cultures," pp. 147-63, in Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses*.

Corbin, Alain. "Charting the Cultural History of the Senses," pp. 128-39, in Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses*.

Cousineau, Jennifer. "The Urban Practice of Jewish Space," in Louis P. Nelson, ed., *American Sanctuary: Understanding Sacred Spaces*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly, and Eugene Rochberg-Halton, *The Meaning of Things: Domestic Symbols of the Self*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

Daniels, Inge. "The Material Culture of Japanese Domesticity," in Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture*.

DeRogatis, Amy, "'Born Again Is a Sexual Term': Demons, STDs, and God's Healing Sperm," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 77, no. 2 (June 2009): 275-302.

Dowson, Thomas A. "Rock Art: Handmaiden to Studies of Cognitive Evolution," pp. 67-76, in Colin Renfrew and Chris Scarre, eds., *Cognition and Material Culture: The Archaeology of Symbolic Storage*. Cambridge: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, 1998.

Drobnick, Jim. "Volatile Effects: Olfactory Dimensions of Art and Architecture," pp. 265-80, in Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses*.

Feld, Steven. "Places Sensed, Senses Placed: Toward a Sensuous Epistemology of Environments," pp. 179-91, in Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses*.

Geary, Patrick. "Sacred Commodities: The Circulation of Medieval Relics," pp. 169-91, in Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things*.

Geurts, Kathryn Linn. "Consciousness as 'Feeling in the Body': A West African Theory of Embodiment, Emotion and the Making of Mind," pp. 164-78, in Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses*.

Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life*. New York: Doubleday, 1959.

Harrington, Laura. "The Feeling of Buddhahood, or Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? Body, Belief and the Practice of Chod," in Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture*.

Hermkens, Anna-Karina. "Clothing as Embodied Experience of Belief," in Morgan, ed., *Religion and Material Culture*.

Howes, David, ed. *Empire of the Senses: The Sensual Culture Reader*. Oxford: Berg, 2005.

Jansen, Michael E. "An American Woman on the Hajj," pp. 222-29, in Bowen and Early, eds., *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*.

Kanafani, Aida S. "Rites of Hospitality and Aesthetics," pp. 128-35, in Bowen and Early, eds., *Everyday Life in the Muslim Middle East*.

Kondo, Dorinne. "The Way of Tea: A Symbolic Analysis," pp. 192-211, in Howes, ed., *Empire of the Senses*.

Kopytoff, Igor. "The Cultural Biography of Things: Commoditization as Process," pp. 64-91, in Appadurai, ed., *The Social Life of Things*.

Lewis-Williams, J. David. *A Cosmos in Stone: Interpreting Religion and Society through Rock Art*. Walnut Creek, Calif.: Altamira Press, 2002.

McGregor, Richard. "Dressing the Ka'ba from Cairo: The Aesthetics of Pilgrimage to Mecca," in Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture*.

Mauss, Marcel. "Techniques of the Body," *Economy and Society* 2 (1973): 70-88.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *Phenomenology of Perception*, tr. Colin Smith. London: Routledge, 1962.

Meyer, Birgit, and Jojada Verrips, "Aesthetics," pp. 20-30, in David Morgan, ed., *Key Words in Religion, Media, and Culture*. London: Routledge, 2008.

Mitchell, Jon P. "Performing Statues," in Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture*.

Morgan, David. "The Look of the Sacred," in Robert A. Orsi, ed., *Cambridge Companion to Religious Studies*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.

Morgan, David. "Painting as Visual Evidence: Production, Circulation, Reception," pp. 8-23, in Richard Howells and Robert W. Matson, eds., *Using Visual Evidence*. Maidenhead, Engl.: Open University Press, 2009.

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Nooter Roberts, Mary. "Tactility and Transcendence: Epistemologies of Touch in African Arts and Spiritualities," in Morgan, ed. *Religion and Material Culture*.

Ovsyannikov, O.V., and N.M. Terebikhin. "Sacred Space in the Culture of the Arctic Regions," pp. 44-81, in David L. Carmichael, Jane Hubert, Brian Reeves, and Audhild Schanche, eds., *Sacred Sites, Sacred Places*. London: Routledge, 1994.

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Method," *Winterthur Portfolio* 17, no.1 (Spring 1982): 1-19.

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Tilley, Christopher A. *Phenomenology of Landscape: Places, Paths, and Monuments*. Oxford: Berg, 1994.

Tuan, Yi-Fu. "Sacred Space: Explorations of an Idea," pp. 84-99, in Karl W. Butzer, ed., *Dimensions of Human Geography: Essays on Some Familiar and Neglected Themes*. Chicago: University of Chicago, Department of Geography, Research Paper 186, 1978.

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