

Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft

Workshop

Aesthetics and Affects of Power in the Context of Religion

May 11– 13, 2022 | Internationales Begegnungszentrum (IBZ) + ONLINE



**UNIVERSITÄT
ERFURT**

Philosophische
Fakultät

Workshop

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Religious practices and discourses took and take an especially important role in creating sensory mechanisms that structure power relations by shaping perception via *aesthetics* and *affects*. The sensory power mechanisms outlive religious practices and expand beyond the religious sphere; they become alive in the body of the aesthetically affected. This workshop aims to understand—by case studies and theoretical reflection—how these sensory mechanisms function in different (religious) contexts, such as (post)colonial contact zones and global religious and spiritual practices and movements; how they relate and intertwine with intersectional discourses and practices, such as racism, whiteness, (s)exoticization, secularization; and how they affect the scholarly practice of the study of religion.

We aim our workshop first and foremost to be a place of exchange on method, theory, knowledge to grasp aesthetics and affects of power and to evaluate possibilities to subvert them. For that we are also explicitly interested in aesthetics and affects of disruption and change of power relations and structures.

The workshop will be held in a hybrid format and online participation is open to all interested parties.

For participation please contact:
Lina Aschenbrenner,
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<https://www.uni-erfurt.de/en/universitaet/aktuelles/veranstaltungenkalender/eventdetail/aesthetics-and-affects-of-power-in-the-context-of-religion>

Workshop Aesthetics and Affects of Power in the Context of Religion

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Time	Wednesday, May 11	Thursday, May 12	Friday, May 13
09:00–10:30 am		Practice Micaela Terk, <i>Digestive Writing Scores</i>	Settings of Aesthetics and Affects of Power 2 ONLINE Isabella Schwaderer, <i>Aryan Bodies on Stage? On Dance, Race and Religion in Nazi Germany</i> Manuel Stadler, <i>The Historical Impact of the Notion of Sin during the French Revolution</i> Katharina Waldner, <i>Aesthetics, (Dis-)Embodiment, and Gender in the History of Religious Studies</i> Final discussion and outlook future perspectives
10:30–11:00 am			
11:00–12:00 pm		Discussion	
12:00–02.30 pm		Lunch (break)	Departure
02.30–04.00 pm		Settings of Aesthetics and Affects of Power 1 ONLINE Yasmina Burezah, <i>Religion and Race in German Hip-Hop: Non-white Aesthetics as a Commodity or Lingua Franca of Emancipation</i> Jessica Albrecht, <i>A girls' School in Sri Lanka—or the Frames of Religion</i> Hanna Griese, <i>Performing National Emotions: Aesthetic Dimensions of the "Torch Lighting Ceremony" for Israel's 70th Independence Day</i>	
04.00–04.30 pm		(Coffee) break	
04.30–06.00 pm	Arrival	Accessing Aesthetics and Affects of Power ONLINE Maike Neufend, <i>The Arrangement of Bodies and Embodied Affectivity</i> Gerrit Lange, <i>The Goddess is Present: Can (and Should) Film Capture the Nonverbal?</i> Lina Aschenbrenner, <i>Between Aesthetics, Affects, and Power Structures</i>	
06:00–07:00 pm	Welcome	Discussion	
07:00–09:00 pm	Dinner	Dinner	
08:00–09:30 pm	Keynote ONLINE Donovan Schaefer, <i>How Reason Gets Racialized: Affect and Queer of Color Theory</i>	Informal get-together	

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Wednesday, 11.05.2022

Keynote ONLINE

How Reason Gets Racialized: Affect and Queer of Color Theory

08:00 pm | Donovan Schaefer

Thursday, 12.05.2022

Practice

Digestive Writing Scores

09:00 am | Micaela Terk

Settings of Aesthetics and Affects of Power 1 ONLINE

Religion and Race in German Hip-Hop: Non-white Aesthetics as a Commodity or Lingua Franca of Emancipation

02:30 pm | Yasmina Burezah

A girls' School in Sri Lanka—or the Frames of Religion

03:00 pm | Jessica Albrecht

Performing National Emotions: Aesthetic Dimensions of the “Torch Lighting Ceremony” for Israel’s 70th Independence Day

03:30 pm | Hanna Griese

Accessing Aesthetics and Affects of Power ONLINE

The Arrangement of Bodies and Embodied Affectivity

04:30 pm | Maike Neufend

The Goddess is Present: Can (and Should) Film Capture the Nonverbal?

05:00 pm | Gerrit Lange

Between Aesthetics, Affects, and Power Structures

05:30 am | Lina Aschenbrenner

Discussion

Discussion

06:00 pm

Friday, 12.12.2022

Settings of Aesthetics and Affects of Power 2 ONLINE

Aryan Bodies on Stage? On Dance, Race and Religion in Nazi Germany

09:00 am | Isabella Schwaderer

The Historical Impact of the Notion of Sin during the French Revolution

09:30 am | Manuel Stadler

Aesthetics, (Dis-)Embodiment, and Gender in the History of Religious Studies

10:00 am | Katharina Waldner

Discussion

Final discussion and outlook future perspectives

10:30 am

Online-participation is possible. Please contact Lina Aschenbrenner, lina.aschenbrenner@uni-erfurt.de

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Wednesday, 11.05.2022

Keynote ONLINE

How Reason Gets Racialized: Affect and Queer of Color Theory

08:00 pm | Donovan Schaefer

This talk analyzes how racist hierarchies come to feel, for dominant groups, like neutral reason. Combining queer of color scholarship with affect theory, it begins by rejecting the traditional Enlightenment divide between thinking and feeling. Rather than seeing racism as the infringement of feeling into the realm of reason, it recasts the whole apparatus of reason as shot through with feeling. Turning to scholars of race and affect like Mel Chen, Sharon Patricia Holland, and José Esteban Muñoz, this model is then developed into a theory of “racialized reason.” “Racialized reason” names the processes by which racist ideas are mobilized and held in place by underlying racialized feelings. The power of these ideas lies in the way they mask their affective determination and present themselves as level ground.

Thursday, 12.05.2022

Practice

Digestive Writing Scores

09:00 am | Micaela Terk

In this performative writing workshop, we will use movement, somatic scores, and *digestive writing* as a means of reflecting on correlations between sensing and doing, particularly within academic frameworks. We will engage methods in embodied critical learning as part of our choreographic exploration into educational environments: a space where the body is disciplined towards supporting cognitive effort, and “physical education” has little to do with embodied sense-making, inferring a very specific form of goal-oriented physicality. Working through a collectively constructed *Embodied Learning Lexicon*, I will invite us to dive into the sensorial affects and power dynamics of the academic environment. Engaging the body as a source of knowledge and structure, we will practice writing as a form of re-writing and re-wiring embodied experience within such environments.

Settings of Aesthetics and Affects of Power 1 ONLINE

Religion and Race in German Hip-Hop: Non-white Aesthetics as a Commodity or Lingua Franca of Emancipation

02:30 pm | Yasmina Burezah

Hip-Hop as an inherently Black art form is both represented and understood as a tool to make marginalized voices heard—a “diasporic lingua franca” (El-Tayeb 2011:40)—and the commodification and consumption of non-white people. Commercially successful German Hip-Hop is defined by the figure of the “Kanake”. Being constructed in reference to US-American Hip-Hop, German Hip-Hop entails the parallelization of the N-Word to the German word: “Kanake”. The term “Kanake” entails collective experiences of discrimination, vulnerability, community and the poverty of being a working-class immigrant in Germany, but also conveys a racial identity linked to brown bodies and/or Islam. In this presentation I will provide a detailed look at the particular affects provoked by hip-hop which manifest norms and carry the power to establish as well as disrupt power structures – depending on the individual context and the particular affected body. What role does the aesthetics of hip-hop actually play in these interrelations of race, religion, class and gender (and masculinity in particular)?

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A girls' School in Sri Lanka—or the Frames of Religion

03:00 pm | Jessica Albrecht

Schools in Sri Lanka are religious institutions. Parents choose their children's school regarding whether it will be fitting for making them proper religious subjects. When asked where this religion takes place or what role religion plays in school, most alumnae do not have a definite answer or cannot draw a line between the religious and the non-religious aspects of school life. This paper will give an insight to the daily practices at Musaeus College, Colombo, its dress codes, assemblies, the shrine room and the remembrance of the school's colonial history. 'Musaeites' consider their school years as formative of their selves; they learned how to be a woman* in Sri Lanka or abroad; they establish a relation to religion happening at the borders of the frame of 'religion'. Their narrations will be put in contact with Butler's theories on affect and assemblages to decolonize the aesthetics of religion.

Performing National Emotions: Aesthetic Dimensions of the "Torch Lighting Ceremony" for Israel's 70th Independence Day

03:30 pm | Hanna Griese

Every year, the State of Israel celebrates its Independence Day with an official ceremony on Mount Herzl in Jerusalem. For its 70th anniversary in 2018, however, a particular opulent celebration was staged. Through a sophisticated performance, employing numerous religious motifs, narratives and symbols, this ceremony not only appealed to all the senses but also shaped national identity and profound emotions. The aesthetical dimension of this ceremony decisively sustains its performativity by shaping emotions that contribute to the legitimization of the performed narratives of national identity.

The presentation examines this ceremony regarding its performative and affective processes, asking on a meta-level for theoretical concepts to frame the case study. Above all, I am interested in the following questions: How are physical-affective activities such as singing and dancing related to the formation and maintenance of national identity? How are emotions shaped in public events and how do they sustain (political) narratives?

[Accessing Aesthetics and Affects of Power ONLINE](#)

The Arrangement of Bodies and Embodied Affectivity

04:30 pm | Maike Neufend

My book project presents an ethnography of the self, embodied by a particular culture of emotion through contemporary spiritual practices in Lebanon. This study resists understanding aesthetic experiences of sensuality and extra-ordinariness as autonomous from social conditions. On the contrary, the study is able to show how spiritual experiences and class membership not only overlap in a kind of aesthetic sociality but are limited to an elite. Within this frame I would like to discuss how an aesthetic experience is constructed by interlocutors between self-care and community-care and how this may be analyzed through communication. By sharing my observations of the meetings with a Sheikh that take place in the apartments of interlocutors, I will show how the bodies are arranged in mutual relation to each other and how this order is maintained and disrupted: the apartment becomes a private-public communication space in which the intensification of perception becomes crucial.

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The Goddess is Present: Can (and Should) Film Capture the Nonverbal?

05:00 pm | Gerrit Lange

How can we try to understand nonverbal communication without merely trying to translate it into written text? In search for an answer, I make use of the medium film to capture those aspects of religious situations that get lost during the translation into text.

In my dissertation project about the Himalayan Hindu Goddess Naiṇī Devī, I try to get hold of the affects, atmospheres and “fields of power” involved in rituals from an angle of filmmaking as well as from an angle of writing. Presenting some scenes of my ethnographic film, “A Goddess as Guest”, I hope for a vivid discussion about film as a is an ethnographic, but largely non-verbal way to think about the nonverbal gestures and sensual strategies involved in forming a system of shared knowledge and interpretations.

Between Aesthetics, Affects, and Power Structures

05:30 am | Lina Aschenbrenner

In line with a paradigm of embodiment, thinking materiality and aesthetics of religion to access and understand the social and cultural impact of religion and its practices has become indispensable to the academic study of religion. On the other hand, scholars have been drawing attention to affects as socially important mechanisms and processes establishing discourses, norms, and power structures. This talk intends to open a space to think materiality, aesthetics, and affects of power together. I start by drawing attention to how an aesthetics of religion approach can be used to ground affect thinking in bodies and to enable the observation and understanding of embodied and thus mostly implicit mechanisms, structures, and processes of power. In turn, I demonstrate that existing affect theories provide a much-needed meta-framework to capture and trace aesthetic processes, which establish power structures and hierarchies. I then introduce ‘assemblage thinking’ as a framework to embrace an aesthetics’ as well as an affects’ focus. Ultimately, I will turn to the example Hawaiian hula dance. Here, existing social and cultural norms, ethics, and categories such as race play a ‘territorializing’ as well as ‘deterritorializing’ role causing the maintenance of colonial power structures as well as enabling their disruption.

Friday, 13.05.2022

Settings of Aesthetics and Affects of Power 2 ONLINE

Aryan Bodies on Stage? On Dance, Race and Religion in Nazi Germany

09:00 am | Isabella Schwaderer

Madame Menaka was the stage name of the Bengali dancer and choreographer Leila Roy-Sokhey (1899-1947) who toured Germany and Europe with her Indian Ballet from 1936-38. I use the press coverage of the tour to shed light on questions regarding religious and racist stereotypes, the notion of "Aryan" or "Aryan origins", and how the ideas of of völkisch art shaped the perception of the theatre critics. How did they look at the visible traits of the performers, their bodies, postures, movements, and skin shades? And how are these discourses related to political attempts to create a master narrative of a racially homogenous and spiritually oriented social utopia? How did the descriptions of the Indian stage performances help to construct a specifically German identity?

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The Historical Impact of the Notion of Sin during the French Revolution

09:30 am | Manuel Stadler

Although the impact of affects related to the concept of religion has become a sort of commonplace to explain outbursts of collective violence during the French Revolution there is only scarce research that focusses on the notion of sin as one specific action motivation among many others.

In this talk I will provide empirical historical data regarding the schism during the French Revolution that allows insight into the feeling rules of socio-historical actors. My theoretical approach is inspired by Robert Hertz' (1881-1915) reflections on religion as a force field consisting of poles of *attraction* and *repulsion*. I will argue that the targets of seemingly irrational acts of group violence were not arbitrary chosen but selected through their symbolic value. My claim is that the notion of sin as an action-guiding motive should be taken seriously in socio-historical research.

Aesthetics, (Dis-)Embodiment, and Gender in the History of Religious Studies

10:00 am | Katharina Waldner

The history of religious studies can be seen as an ongoing disembodiment of religion(s). Starting from ideas of „religion“ as scriptures to be collected (Friedrich Max Müller) and constructing notions like „animism“, „tabu“ or „ritual“, scholars tried to „tame“ religion which they imagined as the religion of the „others“, quite often as „the other“ as such to their own enlightened Christianities. At the same time the concept of „religious experience“ emerged in the field of phenomenology of religions as a means of coming to terms with one's own sadness at the taming and disenchantment of the religious. These descriptions of „religious experiences“ show thus a remarkable ambivalence. „Religious experiences“ are often denoted as „aesthetic“ and extraordinary but at the same time as dangerous, primitive, and female. The paper analyzes this discourse in religious studies texts in the so-called long 19th century, using Jane Ellen Harrison and Gerardus van der Leeuw as a comparative example.

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DREIBRUNNEN Gästehaus im Luisenpark + ONLINE

Contributors

Jessica Albrecht is a PhD student and research fellow at the University of Heidelberg at the Department of Religious Studies and Intercultural Theology. Her PhD focusses on religion, gender and education in Sri Lanka looking at girls' schools founded by western women at the end of the nineteenth century which are still popular today. Jessica's other research interests are the history of feminism, esotericism and eugenics.

Lina Aschenbrenner is a postdoctoral fellow at the religious studies department at the University of Erfurt (Germany). Her areas of research include contemporary religion, neo-spirituality, aesthetics and embodiment, rituals, religious experience, and postcolonialism. In her PhD project she focused on the aesthetics of the Israeli movement practice Gaga as an example of embodied neo-spirituality.

Yasmína Burezah is a PhD candidate and research associate working at the Religion Studies department at the Forum Internationale Wissenschaft at the University of Bonn, Germany. Her research interests include the conceptualization of an Intersectional Study of Religion and postcolonial critical analyses of Race, Religion, and Class with a particular focus on Hip-Hop and Islam in Germany.

Hannah Griese received both her Bachelor's degree and her Master's degree in the Study of Religion at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University of Munich (LMU), where she is currently working on a doctoral thesis in the same field.

Gerrit Lange is a researcher and teacher in the studies of religion department at Marburg University. In his PhD he is trying to understand the selfhood and emotions of a Central Himalayan serpent goddess, bringing together the themes most fascinating to him: the aesthetics and dramaturgies of myth, religious storytelling and embodiment and the way metaphors create and enhance realities.

Maike Neufend works at Open Access Office Berlin and is affiliated research fellow at the Centre for Near and Middle Eastern Studies at University Marburg. Her background is in Islamic Studies, Sociology and Philosophy (MA, University Hamburg) and holds a PhD in Sociology (University Gießen). In her PhD research, she explores the social dimension of affect and emotion by looking at social practices of the Self in relation to experiences of crisis and uncertainty in Beirut's middle class, with a focus on Sufism as aesthetic and social imaginary.

Donovan Schaefer is an assistant professor in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Pennsylvania. His first book, *Religious Affects: Animality, Evolution, and Power* (Duke, 2015) drew links between affect theory, evolutionary biology, and the study of power. His second book, *Wild Experiment: Feeling Science and Secularism after Darwin* (Duke, 2022) argues for a rejection of the feeling/thinking binary and considers the implications of this shift for how we understand a range of topics from science and secularism to racism and conspiracy theory.

Isabella Schwaderer is a research assistant at the chair for Religious Studies at the University of Erfurt where she also obtained her doctorate on Religion, Culture and Politics in Modern Greece in 2014. Her current research includes the documentation of Madame Menakas tour (www.menaka-archive.org) and the entanglements of religion, race, and art in Imperial Germany.

Manuel Stadler is currently writing his PhD about religious policy during the French Revolution in study of religion. He has currently published an article on the Skoptsy and is recently editing a German translation of the censorship lawsuit against the publisher of the collected works of the Marquis de Sade. One of his research fields is the relation between law, religion and transgression.

Micaela Terk is a writer-publisher, designer, artist, and graduate student at the Sandberg Instituut at Amsterdam. She is the artistic director of Goodbye Books and director/co-facilitator of the Embodied Knowledge Bureau: an interdisciplinary platform for investigating, reclaiming, and engaging the body within artistic education. Her practice and community-weaving stems from her commitment to movement research and somatic literacy as transformative forms of knowledge and perception. Her contribution is based on her master thesis at the Sandberg Instituut at Amsterdam.

Katharina Waldner has been Professor of Comparative Religious Studies (Allgemeine Religionswissenschaft) at the University of Erfurt since 2009. She conducts research on the religions of the ancient Mediterranean, early Christianity (martyrdom), on gender and religion, and on the history and theory of religious studies. She is an associate fellow at the Max Weber College for Advanced Cultural and Social Studies.