Religion and Material Culture

The matter of belief

Edited by

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Preface

Interest in the relevance of non-textual sources for the study of religions has been developing for many years. Indeed, ethnographers, art historians, musicologists, and archeologists have long relied on other kinds of evidence. But over the past few decades scholars of religions have looked to ritual, daily practice, imagery, objects, spaces, and bodies as promising ways of enriching and expanding the evidence for studying religions—not as systems of ideas or laws, but as lived, as intuited, as inconsistent, as adaptive. But this development is not without its problems. If the ethnographic, qualitative, and humanistic study of religion runs a grave risk, it is surely the temptation to overemphasize the local and to transform everything it sees into some form of personal or collective meaning. The same is true of material culture studies, which can fall prey to the assumption that often prevails in iconographical analysis—that everything must mean something.

A realization informing the work of many scholars in recent years has been the consideration that human beings do not translate everything significant or compelling into words or engage in a public or private discourse on the matter. They do not need to do so, because the locus of salience is not limited to discursive reasoning. We may speak of other forms of forging meaning or value such as aesthetic intelligence or sensuous cognition. The study of the material cultures of religions is one powerful way of taking that elusive dimension of human experience much more seriously because this approach deploys a set of tools that are able to recognize the nuances of felt-life and to discern its importance for people. The use of things, the sensation of things, the cultivation of feelings that objects, spaces, and performances induce and are in turn colored by—this is the felt-life or aesthetic dimension of human behavior that this book seeks to examine as a vital aspect of religions over time and around the world.

Beliefs have generally been understood, especially by Christian theologians and scholars shaped by Christianity, to consist of ideas or doctrines, the formal teachings of religious institutions. The argument of this book, however, is that beliefs may be much more productively understood as

emerging from and enfolded within the practices, things, and feelings that shape individuals and communities over time. Beliefs are what people do, how they do it, where, and when. Not just why, which is the traditional framing of the contents of belief. In addition to everything else they are, religions, the essays in this book argue, are also characteristically the patterns of feelings and sensations bound up with performances, objects, and spaces. These domains have been widely ignored or regarded as inarticulate or inchoate, but that is only because scholars have not focused their analytical attention on them and have been directed by strongly creedal or dogmatic notions of what "real" religion is, that is, what Christianity or Judaism or Buddhism or Hinduism is, on the arch assumption that such abstractions may be satisfactorily defined by crystallizing their world of belief into clear tenets concerning more or less universal categories of God or gods, afterlife, scriptures, revelation, transcendence, and so forth. Over the last generation this approach has been widely and shrewdly critiqued by anthropologists, historians, and scholars of religion. But in spite of the critique, the bias persists, and the resource of materiality has not fully been recognized or put to effect. We hope this book helps advance that project.

This is a book for students and scholars in any number of disciplines who work on religion and are interested in the study of materiality as a fundamental aspect of their subject. The book offers a wide range of original case studies that explore under key rubrics how religious life is intimately, robustly material. An opening section examines the history of intellectual frameworks and how they have either facilitated or precluded progress in the investigation of religious material culture. Yet, throughout, the assumption is that theory is a tool for doing the scholarly investigation of religions better. In this regard, the aim of the book is to help *materialize* Religious Studies as a field of inquiry.

I wish to thank Lesley Riddle for her encouragement to produce this book and Amy Grant for her collegial assistance and initiative in making it happen. The contributors have labored valiantly to produce readable, substantive essays, and have done so while juggling personal and professional commitments. They have each been a pleasure to work with and have exceeded my expectations for original and progressive scholarship in their subfields and in the larger, much less well-defined precinct called "the material culture of religions." Special thanks to Jojada Verrips and to Larissa Grau for patiently reading drafts and commenting on them. And I express my gratitude to Duke University for a well-timed semester's leave, which was happily invested in writing my contributions and to assembling this volume.

Introduction
The matter of belief

David Morgan

The matter of belief
Overview of the book

The academic study of religion in the modern West has been shaped by the idea that a religion is what someone believes, which consists of a discrete, subjective experience of assent to propositions concerning the origin of the cosmos, the nature of humanity, the existence of deities, or the purpose of life. When seeking to understand a religion, scholars have long tended to ask: what are its teachings? Focus on "belief" as a set of teachings derives from the creedal tradition of Christianity, which was intensified by Protestantism. From there, belief passed beyond the realm of religion into the philosophy of language, where it came to be strictly defined in terms of the truth-value of a proposition. Anthropologists and others have challenged "the generally unquestioned assumption that adherents of a given religion, any religion, understand that adherence in terms of belief" (Lopez 1998: 21). Some have strongly urged scholars not to regard belief as a universal mental or "inner state" that might serve as a frame for the study of religion (Needham 1972). In an examination of the ethnographer's use of "belief," anthropologist Rodney Needham concluded that the concept "does not constitute a natural resemblance among men, and it does not belong to 'the common behaviour of mankind'" (ibid.: 188). He scrutinized the Christian legacy shaping the English verb, "believe," which he maintained had shifted from the older Jewish idea of trust to the New Testament idea of accepting the *kerygma* or message of Jesus Christ (ibid.: 48). Talal Asad famously argued that:

> [Clifford] Geertz's treatment of religious belief, which lies at the core of his conception of religion, is a modern, privatized Christian one because and to the extent that it emphasizes the priority of belief as a state of mind rather than a constituting activity in the world.
>
> (1993: 47; and see Keane 2008).

Yet another anthropologist, Malcolm Ruel, conducted a more detailed survey of the history of Christian thought regarding belief, showing how it had evolved from the New Testament to the modern period. Ruel found that the

sound in corporate worship, their visual articulations of sacred writ, their creation of spaces that sculpt sound and shape living architectures of human bodies—all these vastly exceed the narrow idea of a religion as the profession of creeds or catechetical formulae singularly understood to represent an inner state of volition. Insisting that any religion consists of the affirmation of a salient corpus of beliefs is a reductionism that does violence to the particularity and diversity of human religions by imposing a rigid template on them. By the same token, setting up "faith" or "trust" or "covenant" as the norm is no less presumptuous.

And yet I submit that we need to be able to compare accounts of different religions in a way that allows for similarities no less than fundamental differences. Belief may be serviceable if understood in broad, but also somatic or material terms. People report the reality of UFOs, the presence of angels, hearing the voice of God, the power of spirits to work for good or ill, the ability of Quranic text to bestow *baraka*, of passages of Torah bundled in a mezuzah to do the same, of the Bible opened randomly to reveal a pertinent scripture verse. Describing these as beliefs in the thin sense of affirmed dogmas fails miserably to help us understand what is happening in the lives of those in which these practices may be observed. These examples evince knowledge, conviction, memory, imagination, sensation, emotion, ritual action. Under what terms could the single word 'belief' be meaningfully applied to mark out their family resemblances without compromising their necessary and irreducible peculiarities?

In a fascinating essay entitled "The Fixation of Belief," American philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce described belief not as a linguistic phenomenon, but as a psychological and physiological one. "Our beliefs guide our desires and shape our actions," he wrote. "The feeling of believing is a more or less sure indication of there being established in our nature some habit which will determine our actions" (Peirce 1992: 1:114). Belief was feeling and habit linked intimately to action. He went on to contrast the experience of belief with the feeling of doubt:

> Doubt is an uneasy and dissatisfied state from which we struggle to free ourselves and pass into the state of belief; while the latter is a calm and satisfactory state which we do not wish to avoid, or to change to a belief in anything else. On the contrary, we cling tenaciously, not merely to believing, but to believing just what we do believe.
>
> (ibid.)

Belief as active clinging or holding to, as habit, as feeling suggests that even when people do utter religious creeds, they are doing far more than affirming the truth of a proposition. It also suggests that religion need not involve propositions and affirmations whatsoever. Belief is much more than

a linguistic event. Let us consider a hypothetical instance drawn from the area of my own scholarly expertise, the history of Christianity. I do so not to privilege that religion, which, indeed, I have been attempting to de-privilege, but to show that the very religion from which the bias arose regarding belief itself offers grounds for re-conceiving belief.[2]

When someone says, "I believe in God" and is asked what he intends by that, he may reply, "I affirm the existence of the creator and sustainer of the universe," in effect, elaborating what he means by "God." But if asked what "believe" means, he may frown at being asked something so obvious. Then he may move to the affective register of the experience of believing and say, "I feel certain that God exists" or "I am convinced with all of my heart" or "There is no doubt in my mind regarding the proposition." If he is asked how he is so sure, he might reply that the belief matters to him more than anything else. Why? Because he has always believed this, ever since his youngest days, and has never found himself to be in error for doing so.

At this point our believer has revealed something very important. He brings Peirce's insights to mind by suggesting that belief is a practice and that it was absorbed in childhood. The habit of feeling certain is something he has practiced over and over. There was not a time when he did not believe. From the beginning, his parents and siblings and extended family have believed. What does that mean? By focusing on the practices of belief, we can have a very concrete notion of what this means: They sat with him at dinner and prayed; they attended church on Sundays, perhaps gathering in the same order in the same pew week after week; he was a member of a church choir or an acolyte or participated in a youth group that prayed and read the Bible and gathered regularly to engage in Christian activities; he and his family sang hymns at Christmas, ate foods peculiar to that holiday and others on Easter; read scripture in the evenings around the kitchen table. Were these cognitive exercises? Marginally, but primarily they were the iteration of familiar feelings packaged and evoked and regularly rehearsed in the techniques of the body that he acquired from the earliest moments of his family and communal life. He was taught how to fold his hands when praying, to close his eyes, to sit still and erect, to kneel at bedside, what voice to use as he prayed, as well as the archaic verbiage of prayers and snippets of pious diction; he learned when and how to stand and kneel and genuflect (if Catholic) during worship, how loud to sing, how to blend his voice with those around him.

All of this is the slowly sedimentary practice of belief, built up over the course of his life and inflected with the feelings toward his family and friends and community, endlessly repeated, tirelessly educating the ear, the eye, the palette, the body's schemes of posture and gesture. So when our interlocutor says that he believes in God, we must listen for the silent speech beneath his words, the habits and felt-life of old practices. We must learn to

hear his sighs, his gritted teeth, the murmur of nostalgia, the distant gaze of eyes searching the memory of folded hands, sore knees, and the lingering melody of the Eucharistic liturgy. He says he believes, but what he really does is feel, smell, hear, and see.

There is, then, another way of thinking about belief. What if belief were about more than faith in things unseen, trust in divine promises, or the declaration of the truth of certain teachings? What if believing were not fundamentally different from seeing or smelling or dressing or arranging space? People need not recite creedal statements to be described as believers. In other words, a narrow version of Christian practice should not dictate the terms for defining "belief." What is belief? In Christianity it commonly involves an act of volition and a symbolic expression in speech, but it need not exhibit either feature prominently, or perhaps not at all. Our reflections on Peirce's observations imply that belief is not best understood as a discrete linguistic event. "The essence of belief," he proclaimed in another essay, "is the establishment of a habit." A belief acts as "a rule for action" (Pierce 1992: vol. 1, p. 129). Accordingly, an utterance of belief properly regarded is but the visible tip of an entire iceberg. Limning the girth and structure of the submerged body of belief is the purpose of this book.

So if it is advisable to look for religion along broader avenues than creedal utterances, and it certainly is, then we do well to look for ways of believing that engage more of a human being than discursive performance alone. This will mean examining how people behave, feel, intuit, and imagine as ways of belief. This will mean regarding utterances as symbolic events that are anchored to much larger processes. Belief is not merely the symbolic act of representation, but the symbol as well as all that it evokes and draws on. The acting, feeling, intuiting, and imagining absorbed and practiced over time are signified by a proposition of belief. But belief is more than the linguistic act of signification. These activities are implicit in a statement like "She believes that she should behave thus and so because her god expects it of her." To understand or apprehend the nature and content of her belief, we must examine far more than the utterance as a proposition within a system of propositions.

The deep shape of the belief, in other words, is everything that issues in the utterance, for it is the history and momentum of embodied practices that engage her person in a duty or practice or feeling enjoined by her deity. Religious and ethical belief is a holding to a practice and a tradition of that practice. Such holding may be represented in statements of belief, or tenets, from the Latin *tenere*, to hold, but should not be reduced to them. Moreover, such statements may not be even remotely creedal. The connections cherished by believers are to the elders, ancestors, or founders, whose ways they remember ritually and devotionally as forms of reverence. John of Damascus insisted on venerating icons because it is "the tradition of the Church,"

which he reminded the iconoclasts came down in written form as well as non-written. "Therefore, since so much that is unwritten has been handed down in the Church and is still observed now, why do you despise images?" (Damascus 2000: 31–2). A Cheyenne account of the origin of the sun dance revealed that the dance "was conceived and taught to the people by the Creator, Maheo, and his helper, Great Roaring thunder" through the intermediary of a legendary medicine man named Horns Standing Up (Erdoes and Ortiz 1984: 34). The shaman was told by Maheo to teach it to the people, and that "if they perform the ceremonies in the right way, they will be favored for generations to come" (ibid.: 36). Or consider the countless myths that explain physical circumstances, infusing the physical world with the traces of the sacred such as the Hui Muslim story that the angel in paradise grabbed Adan (the biblical Adam) by his throat as he ate the apple, though Haowa (Eve) entirely swallowed the fruit. The result was an Adam's apple in his throat and her body's menstruation (Li and Luckert 1994: 78). The first deeds were registered in the body, and remembered somatically through the ages. This is not to suggest, of course, that religionists do not avail themselves of polemic or reason. John of Damascus readily provided theological deductions to support his practice of icon veneration, but reason did not have the final say. The authority of belief lay in the tradition of authority, which consisted of a lineage of practices traced back to the apostles and to Jesus himself (whose endorsement of icons was evident to John of Damascus in the legend of the messiah's contemporary, King Abgar, who received a cloth bearing the features of Jesus' face[3]). Rather than weighting religion in favor of doctrines and propositions, scholars of lived religion may understand teachings as ways of framing, securing, and disseminating habits and practices. In other words, to say "I believe" might be understood to mean that one holds to a particular habit of feeling, willing, thinking, and practice. When believers do utter abstract statements like "I believe my God is the only God," we can know what that means by asking the difference it makes in their behavior, e.g. that they object to the use of images for fear of inciting God's jealousy.

Therefore, instead of asking "what does a religion teach?" we might focus on the social and interpersonal relations that characterize practitioners of a religion. We might ask alternatively: what is it that people teach their children? Yet even that question remains in the orbit of content, reducing religion to the delivery of sacred information. *What* they teach their children certainly matters, but in what manner and on what occasions they teach them will be no less important to consider. Thus, a better approach might inquire: *how*, *when*, and *where* do people teach their children *what* they teach them? This moves the inquiry to the register of material culture by examining the conditions that shape the feelings, senses, spaces, and performances of belief, that is, the material coordinates or forms of religious practice. By shifting

attention to what people do, and understanding belief as grounded in practice, we open the door for substantive analysis of the materiality of religion since making, exchanging, displaying, and using artifacts are principal aspects of human doing.

Wilfred Cantwell Smith's eloquent definition of faith quoted above, "an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbour, to the universe, ... ," captures something fundamental, though it is imbued with the humanistic ideals of personalism. Belief is a broad orientation that emerges from the habits absorbed in childhood or at other times in life such as conversionary periods when, like learning a new language, the mind is powerfully opened under conditions of duress or crisis to absorbing fundamental new patterns. Belief is a shared imaginary, a communal set of practices that structure life in powerfully aesthetic terms. Belief is perhaps best framed as a pervasive community of feeling because the holding that it involves is public and verifiable when it consists of holding to other people and the institutions they share.

Belief, this book will argue, is much more than assent or conviction if we understand it as a disposition that engages diverse aspects of a human being. Belief may be defined in many ways: *dogmatically*, as the affirmation of tenets; *affectively*, as the experience of certain feelings and emotions; *voluntaristically*, as the necessary or willful performance of certain duties; and *practically*, as participation in a group's discrete or definitive practices. The voluntaristic and the practical are distinguished by virtue of conscious determination, on the one hand, and the shaping effect of repetition, on the other, though the two are clearly related to one another. In his comprehensive *Critique of Religion and Philosophy*, a systematic résumé of theories and definitions of religious and philosophical domains and their relations to one another, Walter Kaufmann concluded that reductionist approaches to religion failed consistently. He prudently urged an integrated approach, which will be the framework for this book:

> The chief lesson of a survey of attempted definitions of religion is that, in religion, practice, feeling, and belief are intertwined, and every definition that would see the essence of religion in just one of these three facets is too partial.
>
> (Kaufmann 1961: 103)

The matter of belief

Rather than marginalizing belief, we need a more capacious account of it, one that looks to the embodied, material features of lived religion. A recent collection of essays entitled *Materializing Religion* put the matter quite nicely: "the idea of religion itself is largely unintelligible outside its incarnation in

material expressions" (Arweck and Keenan 2006: 2–3). Anthropologist Webb Keane has aptly observed that "Religions may not always demand beliefs, but they will always involve material forms" (Keane 2008: 124). Forms of materiality—sensations, things, spaces, and performance—are a matrix in which belief happens as touching and seeing, hearing and tasting, feeling and emotion, as will and action, as imagination and intuition. Moreover, religion happens not *in* spaces and performances as indifferent containers, but *as* them, carved out of, overlaid, or running against prevailing modes of place and time. Materiality refers to more than a concrete object or to this or that feeling. Sensation is an integrated process, interweaving the different senses and incorporating memory, and emotion into the relationships human beings have with the physical world.

Materiality is a compelling register in which to examine belief because feeling, acting, interacting, and sensation embody human relations to the powers whose invocation structures social life. Most believers live their religion in the grit and strain of a felt-life that embodies their relation to the divine as well as to one another. The transcendent does not come to them as pure light or sublime sensations in most cases, but in the odor of musty shrines or moldering robes or the pantry where they pray. Thus, medieval European pilgrimage tasted of the dust of roads headed toward Santiago de Compostella; its sound was the din of the crowds mulling in markets on cobbled squares before cathedrals; its look and feel were the colored light piercing the dark coolness housed within; it smelled of sweaty bodies, baked bread, and incense. And all of these sensations intermingled to embody contrition, petition, offering, pledge, and redemption. The saints themselves returned the gaze of the penitent. They looked at the devout and expected a response. So the pilgrims uttered prayers, offered what they could, made their promises, heard the mass in its inscrutable Latin, glimpsed the Host, gazed on the reliquary in which resided a precious bit of sacred matter, and then returned home to await the work of the saint.

Belief is the felt expectation that the world works in a particular way. In order to understand belief, the scholar is not content with lapidary professions from the believer, but looks at what the person does and feels, how he rears his children, how (as well as what) she teaches them, how believers parse time, organize space, how they train, regard, and decorate their bodies. In each of these are evident the material conditions under which they seek certain ends. By assaying the felt-life of belief, the scholar aims to understand how belief shapes or colors human consciousness, how it operates as a way of knowing, or, perhaps better put, as a way of feeling, by which I do not mean a thoughtless state of emotion, but something like the domain of practical reason. What I have in mind is an approach to religion that attends to belief as an embodied epistemology, the sensuous and material routines that produce an integrated (and culturally particular) sense of self, community, and cosmos. It is not only to systematic theology or sacred

philosophy that we look to learn this, but to the lived world of belief. In particular, to the forms of materiality which organize the world.

It makes sense therefore to turn to the history of epistemology and phenomenology in modern philosophical thought as one way to expand the framework for thinking about belief. These traditions take sensation and the structure of consciousness very seriously. An ample conception of belief is at work, for example, in the way the word was used by philosopher David Hume to describe the most quotidian assumption of what one might call the minded body: the belief that the table at which I write will continue to exist into the next moment. Sitting at the table, resting my arms on it, is a *corporeal practice of belief* that seldom becomes conscious, except in moments of artistic or meditative experience or those junctures in practice when the body's pain or pleasure or the flow of experience congeal into states of awareness. But my belief in the endurance of this table does not rely on a particular state of consciousness. It consists in what my body does.

The persistence of the material world is a belief no less than the willed assumption that gods exist or that pouring a libation in honor of a spirit will secure good fortune. Indeed, the two forms of belief are one in the same for religious believers. Is the divine any less real, any less relevant, than the duration of a table? In both cases, belief is the glue that holds the world together. My belief that the table will continue to exist is not, strictly speaking, a rational assertion. Indeed, as Hume argued, it's not an operation of reason at all, but the effect of custom, which led him to argue that "all probable reasoning is nothing but a species of sensation. 'Tis not solely in poetry and music, we must follow our taste and sentiment, but likewise in philosophy" (Hume 2000: 72). And for this reason Hume spoke in sensuous terms of discriminating one opinion or belief from another species of idea. An idea we believe "feels different from a fictitious idea, that the fancy alone presents to us: And this different feeling I endeavour to explain by calling it a superior *force*, or *vivacity*, or *solidity*, or *firmness*, or *steadiness*" (ibid.: 68; italics in original). Belief that X is the cause of Y is an idea that results from the impression or sensation of the repeated association of Y following X. As a mental phenomenon, belief is always traceable to sensation.

In this manner, belief shows itself to be a corporeal assumption or expectation, the cognitive predisposition of an embodied epistemology. Belief is what I know with my body. I feel the world enduring, I address its endurance with my gesture, the distribution of my body's mass, with a robust leap of expectation as I push against the floor and the chair and rest my elbows on the hard surface of the table. If it were not there and the world did not behave the way it does, I would not only think and feel differently, I would act otherwise. The pressure in my ears tells me that the world is there, welcoming my balanced gesture or rhythmic gait. The sidewalk will not abruptly jump into the air when I step on it. I believe that because my body

tells me it is so—not in words, but in feelings, in the minute intuitions of sensation confirmed by the body's archives of long experience. Belief begins as the material fit between body and habitat, the delicate sensory loop arcing from body–mind to environment and back.

All ideas, Hume asserted, begin with sensation. In the twentieth century, the phenomenological philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty expressed very well the intimate relation of body and world. Though he did not discuss belief in the way that Hume did, he carefully distinguished the consciousness of the body's construction of the world from the scientific knowledge of the Cartesian cogito, the domain of propositional or logical discourse:

> The identity of the thing through perceptual experience is only another aspect of the identity of one's own body throughout exploratory movements ... I am involved in things with my body, they co-exist with me as an incarnate subject, and this life among things has nothing in common with the elaboration of scientifically conceived things.
>
> (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 215)

Merleau-Ponty moved beyond Hume's association of ideas approach to the relation of body and meaning by developing a much more intricate account of the integral relationship between perception and abstract cognition. He spoke of the "natural self" (*un moi naturel*) as distinct from the intellectual self.[4] The natural self, the sentient subject, was that aspect of consciousness that exists in sensation and "enters into a sympathetic relation with" the qualities of things (ibid.: 248).

The self does not simply create representations of the world, but participates in the world such that "the sensible ... is nothing other than a certain way of being in the world ... so that sensation is literally a form of communion" (by which Merleau-Ponty explicitly alluded to the Christian sacrament of the Eucharist (ibid.: 246)). He characterized the human body as the interface with the world: "My body is the fabric into which all objects are woven, and it is, at least in relation to the perceived world, the general instrument of my 'comprehension'" (ibid.: 273). The body is both part of the world and the means by which the world is understood. Even words, he pointed out, are sensible to the body:

> It is my body which gives significance not only to the natural object, but also to cultural objects like words. If a word is shown to a subject for too short a time for him to be able to read it, the word "warm," for example, induces a kind of experience of warmth which surrounds him with something in the nature of a meaningful halo ... Before becoming the indication of a concept [the word] is first of all an event which grips my body.
>
> (ibid.)

Merleau-Ponty did not wish to reduce words or percepts to bodily sensations, but to recognize the body's powerful role in crafting the apprehension and understanding of the world. The body, he asserted, "is that strange object which uses its own parts as a general system of symbols for the world, and through which we can consequently 'be at home in' the world, 'understand' it and find significance in it" (ibid.: 275).

Merleau-Ponty's philosophical work is largely corroborated by neurobiological studies since his day. Antonio Damasio's important work on emotion and feeling makes many of the same points summarized from Merleau-Ponty. Damasio points out that the neural patterns or mental maps that constitute the brain's response to external stimuli are "based on changes which occur [*sic*] in our organisms ... when the physical structure of the object interacts with the body" (Damasio 1999: 320). Consciousness is "the unified mental pattern that brings together the object and the self" (ibid.: 11). Damasio stresses the monistic plane that joins brain and world, and he stringently avoids any kind of dualism that segregates thought as a separate substance. In a way that recalls Merleau-Ponty's discussion of the natural self and the cogito or intellectual self, Damasio describes levels of consciousness. There is what he calls "core consciousness," which:

> occurs when the brain's representation devices generate an imaged, nonverbal account of how the organism's own state is affected by the organism's processing of an object, and when this process enhances the image of the causative object, thus placing it saliently in a spatial and temporal context.
>
> (ibid.: 169)

Core consciousness only renders a sense of the present. What Damasio calls "extended consciousness" introduces the sense of past and future, the broader range of time allowing greater articulation of sequence for narration, computation, and subtle determinations of change, causation, and reasoning (ibid.: 195–202). This corresponds to Merleau-Ponty's description of the cogito, that higher sense of self that seems distant from what it contemplates. Yet for both philosopher and neuroscientist, all consciousness is grounded in the body.

Both philosophical and scientific considerations suggest that we do not understand the embodied nature of religious belief until we reckon the intimate way in which felt expectations bind together imagined and physical universes for believers. The aim driving the chapters in this book is to demonstrate in various ways that belief should be studied as taking place in material practices. Belief should not be understood as coming only before such things as the veneration of relics or the ecstatic drudgery of pilgrimage, but as being constituted by them. People do what they want to believe. They

make belief in the things they do. This book argues that materiality *mediates* belief, that material objects and practices both enable it and enact it. Handling objects, dressing in a particular way, buying, displaying, and making gifts of particular commodities, attending certain events are all activities that engage people in the social relations and forms of sacred imagination that structure their relations to the divine. Each of these activities and countless others, whether performed by Christians or Hindus or Wiccans, construct particular bodies of belief. If we are to understand that, we must attend to a set of rubrics that will ground the study of religions in materiality.

Overview of the book

The chapters are divided into five areas of focus: theory, sensation, things, spaces, and performance. Their common task is to demonstrate how belief is the structuring, dynamic activity of material practices in particular historical and cultural circumstances. Emerging from embodied experience or sensation, from engagement with things, unfolding and defining sacred spaces, and activated by many forms of performance, belief owes far more to the body than Religious Studies has often allowed. In every case, the account of materiality will argue that the study of the material cultures of religions is not the study of objects *per se,* nor a neurological approach to belief, nor even in the first instance a new chapter in body studies. Instead, the argument is that the study of religions will benefit from an approach that undertakes an abundant account of social life mediated in feelings, things, places, and performances. It is not a new art history or a new material culture, but is framed by the social construction of the sacred. The approach takes the human body not as an irreducible essence, not as a universal language, not as the material substrate of soul or spiritual essence, but as something made and self-making.

It has become customary to open scholarly books with chapters on theory. This is a useful practice when theoretical vistas are made to shed light on analytical practice, to inform interpretation with its history of thought, its assumptions, limits, and opportunities. But theory-wonking—stressing theory for its own sake—is not useful, in my estimation, if the task at hand is to illuminate analysis and interpretation. So the book begins with a section devoted to theory, but we hope theory as a tool for improving the practice of critical thinking about the study of religious material culture. Chapter 1, by Jojada Verrips, is an intellectual history of how the social sciences have approached the study of religion, and what limitations and advantages are important to recognize by scrutinizing conceptual orientations that have directed scholarship. From the vantage point of a distinguished career as a social and economic anthropologist, Verrips provides a subtle reflection, framed autobiographically, on the quest among social

scientists, in particular anthropologists, to overcome the mind/body split, a tenacious dualism that has long compromised the need to give the body its due as a constitutive participant in the experience, valuation, and meaning-making of human culture, especially religion.

In Chapter 2, Gordon Lynch turns to object relations theory in the psychoanalytic tradition in order to explore how scholarship can understand better the power of beliefs as affixed to mental objects, and by extension, to their material counterparts. As a result, objects take on a life and allure, even an agency that anthropologists and art historians have observed at work in religious devotion and ritual. Lynch's attention to the psychological dimension also underscores how terms like "material culture" and "visual culture" should not be restricted to their physical objects, but understood in the broader register of mind, body, sociality, and culture. I bring Part I to a close with a survey of a large body of work in order to discern major categories of thought that have cleared the way in recent decades for thinking substantively about the materiality of religion. The categories that I identify are reflected in the subsequent organization of the book's chapters.

The range of themes raised in the first three chapters will resonate throughout the rest of the book, which consists of case studies that focus on discrete religious traditions and histories. These chapters cluster around the themes of sensation, things, spaces, and performance. At the heart of all of these are two interwoven topics: embodiment and belief. Each of these essays argues in its own way that the two are in fact inseparable. Understanding how, in view of considerable differences and variations from one moment and tradition to another, is the overarching concern of this book.

Sensation is a broad assortment of human experiences—physical contact with the worlds within and beyond the body's material envelope as these are defined by touch, sight, smell, and sound, but also memory, intuition, and imagination, what might be called inner sensation. Sensation, in other words, is part of a single continuum stretching from the senses to the brain's emotional coding, intuition, memory, feeling, and ratiocination. The inherent instability of the world and the body consists of their own transience as systems of energy relentlessly passing into one state and out of another; of the various sensory thresholds of the human body and the conceptual registers and cultural imaginaries of different human groups, times, and places. Sensation touches on all of these by recording, translating, interpreting, compensating, and transforming what may be ambivalently referred to as "experience."

If Gordon Lynch reminds us of the broader register in sensation's conceptual and social aspects, Mary Nooter Roberts' chapter demonstrates how objects are situated within encompassing sensoria. Seeing is not an isolated human activity, but part of movement and touch. This suggests that the study of materiality invites scholars to emerge from the tight hold of

disciplines that focus attention on one sense (such as seeing or hearing) or one form of information (such as texts or language) in order the better to match their analyses to the object of their study. It also suggests that the "meanings" we seek to grasp are not exhausted by conventional concepts of scholarship. The challenge is to develop ways of study and understanding that recognize that such things as feeling, time, social configuration, and sensations or the experience of compound artifacts such as image/texts or sound/motion or touch/narrative are the principal and compelling shapes of meaning for many religious practitioners. Laura Harrington's chapter on Tibetan Buddhist meditation practice shows how sensation and the experience of embodiment are a fundamental means of overcoming the body–mind's tenacious hold on the illusion of Self. By placing themselves in the grisly midst of the cremation grounds, Tantric Buddhist practitioners confront the very sensations and feelings and conceptual patterns that secure the hold that fear exerts and that keeps people clinging to selfhood.

Things are as unstable as sensations because things arise from sensation. But one of the things cultures do is seek to discern and produce relative stabilities for the sake of constructing and maintaining life-worlds. Things are manufactured as sensory objects, as socially shared and circulating, and as apprehended through the lens or grip or scent of culturally defined practices and templates. A person's sense of something, in other words, is biologically, socially, and culturally constructed. Things circulate through a variety of protocols of exchange. They are displayed, hidden, disguised, forgotten, destroyed, re-created. They exhibit biographies and are often best studied over time.

In Chapter 6, Allen Roberts examines the restless lives of images as they migrate from one setting to the next, showing how meaning is inconstant and best understood within the itinerary of an object's travel. This throws considerable light on the importance of the relations that people enter with images, on the agency that images can exhibit, on the transience of meanings, on the way in which images becomes 'sites of contestation' between rival parties, and how interdependent images, narratives, and physical and social contexts are in the experience of an image's value. In Chapter 7, Jeremy Biles directs our attention to the problem of visualizing the supernatural, the unknown, the mystical—the very things whose existence threatens the stability of the ordinary. Fascinated by apparitions, Biles considers the key role that visual media play in mediating or capturing what may be otherwise invisible or unseeable. Photographs occupy a kind of liminal place because they reproduce what is physical but also register what is unseen without their intervention. Media, therefore, make things and play a fundamental part in making the sacred.

Inge Daniels' ethnographic study of dolls in contemporary Japanese homes in Chapter 8 shows how deeply engaged people become with objects,

including even those they do not wish to possess. People are tied to objects by the obligation of the gift economy, but also by the economy of luck, which governs the circulation of fortune and misfortune. Owners conceal some dolls because by seeing them and living with them, they would activate the dolls' tendency to respond to them. By the same token, disposing of the dolls improperly can invite bad luck. The world of things is animated with a viscosity and momentum that restricts human autonomy since agency comes at a price. To live in a world that responds to human presence means accepting the consequences of a world in which things are able to act with an agency of their own.

Spaces are the arenas erected in different times and places for certain things to happen, for performances to take place, for the sacred to become sensible, for discrete modes of possibility to prevail. But spaces are not the empty opposite of things, for the two come attached to one another. Things imply a certain kind of space; spaces allow for certain kinds of things. Spaces and things are cultural realities that belong to one another. Spaces are often presumed universal, but encoded in them are various hierarchies, concepts of public, private, and semi-private, or family, clan, and nation—all of which amount to the coordinates of belonging. They make visible, but also render other things or people invisible. They are made to contain but also to make possible the existence of objects. Spaces are structures created by circulation, patterns of movement, cycles of activity, hierarchies, and series that are maintained by religious narratives and rites, in the wilderness or bush, on pilgrimage, in home, village, city, and in transnational migrations. Spaces render worlds from the environment, making the unknown familiar and wresting order from chaos.

In Chapter 9, Jens Baumgarten investigates the theatrical wherewithal of Baroque and Neo-Baroque churches in Brazil as stages for performing revelation, sainthood, authority, and national identity. The spaces of twentieth-century churches build on their seventeenth-century predecessors by orchestrating the visual piety of Brazilian Catholicism, in particular by providing the *mise-en-scène*, or stage setting for paintings and sculptures that enact sacred history. The power, and the failure, of spaces to embody identity, to create or fail to create community ideals, to materialize a desired aim are the subject of Gretchen Buggeln's examination of mid-twentieth-century American construction of instructional spaces by Protestant congregations. In Chapter 10, she considers the confident claim of Protestant educators and architects that the physical environment of the Sunday School exerted a powerful influence on the moral and intellectual formation of children. And yet, Buggeln is struck by the cavalcade of changes inserted during actual planning and construction that compromised the faith in material forms to shape spiritual constitution. Did environment influence children or did it not? Or did mundane finances intervene to curtail the ideals of a tradition

commonly dismissed for its aesthetic frugality? On the other side of the world, in an entirely different religious context and historical tradition, Insoo Cho shows in Chapter 11 how objects and spaces are mutually engaged in Korean ancestral shrines. He stresses the important relation that images and sacred objects have to ritual practices and spaces such as funerals, commemorative rites, and shrines, thus resisting the tendency among some art historians to separate the artifact from its milieu in accord with a Western aesthetic of disinterested contemplation. Not only are object and space knit together by ritual practice, they structure seeing as a form of engagement with space and time that may not be abstracted from the context without changing the meaning of the artifact.

Performance is not limited to formal, scripted ceremony or official rite, but includes how people perform different roles in the settings of daily life. Everyday performance is not theatrical or artistic in a formal sense, but the quotidian dramaturgy of social life. Performance puts things and spaces together to accomplish a wide range of cultural work. Essays in this section of the book consider many ways in which things participate in performances and how performances both presuppose and generate spaces and sensations. Performances are not only enactments of rigidly prescribed scripts, but, whether improvised or carefully planned, they are actions that achieve their purpose (or not) by being conducted. The chapters each demonstrate how thinking about performance and ritual practice returns us to the materiality of things, the character of bodies as gendered, sexed, and otherwise culturally constructed, and the sacred as a relational process that constellates people, spaces, objects, and the divine.

In Chapter 12, Anna-Karina Hermkens considers how clothing enters into the performance of personal and social identity, allowing the body/person to perform roles that bring new accents or meanings. Cloth mediates the living and the dead, drawing value from the remains of the ancestors and then distributing it among family or clan members. Spirits enter the living in part through the ritual clothing they wear. In a powerfully corporeal way, clothing changes the person, becoming the body and touching all aspects of the wearer. In no minor way we are what we wear. Clothing is not only a social form of communication, although it certainly is that, but also operates in a more visceral manner as a way of embodiment. The power of dress comes into another view with Richard McGregor's study of the clothing of the Ka'ba, which Muslim practice has long animated as a feminine personality that draws pilgrims to Mecca. The Ka'ba enjoys the special devotion of residents of Cairo, where the *kiswa*, the elaborate black and embroidered clothing of the structure, is fabricated and sent to Mecca for the stately adornment of the stone pivot of the Muslim devotional universe. In Chapter 13, McGregor traces the fascinating history of the pilgrimage that delivers the sacred clothing, showing how the transmission of the *kiswa* has never enjoyed

a place of prominence in scholarship. By retraining the focus on the practice of carrying and displaying the *kiswa*, his chapter demonstrates how the study of the Hajj is affected by materializing it and how performance can distribute the sacred over time and space rather than locating it only in one place.

Jon Mitchell brings the book to an eloquent close with his ethnographic investigation of the communal performance of statues of the Virgin, St. Paul, and the Crucified Jesus during annual *festas* in their honor on the island of Malta. Mitchell is especially good at showing how images for Maltese Catholics are not merely symbols, placeholders for ideas, but forms of presence grounded in centuries of Catholic practice and thought. The procession of images is one of the ways in which saintly or divine presence happens for devotees. This activity brings the images to life by removing them from their usual situation within the church interior, by allowing participants to interact with the sacred personages, and by allowing the saints or Jesus themselves to respond to the local setting. For example, a large statue of St. Paul pauses at side streets as he proceeds in order to bless them with his glance. The engagement of the devotee with the image is intimately embodied and best understood in the category of presence that Mitchell articulates, an experience that cannot be understood without careful attention to the ritual and spatial setting and the devotee's performative engagement with the imagery.

Readers will be struck by the diversity of topics and I hope welcome their historical, geographical, and religious variance from one another. But throughout the range of essays, the book will achieve its principal purpose if readers discern that belief is a useful framework for analysis when it is understood as what people do to encounter in things, bodies, spaces, and action the realities that would amount to nothing if their mystery were not mediated by human practice.

Notes

1 Smith's passionate project to universalize faith as a human phenomenon has been carefully criticized by Ruel (1997: 54–6).

2 One might step far beyond the Christian world to examine the intricate organization of practices and spaces in the Berber house as described by Pierre Bourdieu in a now classic essay that explored the intimate integration of the structure of the interior of a Berber house in North Africa into the landscape and cosmos, delineating the interior spatial structure of life (especially of girls and women) from birth to maturity (Bourdieu 1970).

3 Damascus (2000: 35). He also frequently quoted Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, who was long believed to have been the man whom Paul converted while preaching in Athens, mentioned in Acts 17: 34.

4 Merleau-Ponty (1962: 251); cf. Merleau-Ponty (1945: 249). For more recent phenomenological analysis of embodiment, particularly the "embodied self," see Csordas (1990); Gallagher (2005: 78–84); and Thomas (2006).

Part I

THEORY

1

Body and mind
Material for a never-ending intellectual odyssey

Jojada Verrips

Religion and the body
Body–mind in anthropology
Religion and belief

Once upon a time I thought that the distinction between body and mind was as useless as that made by Marx between *Unterbau* and *Überbau*. As a matter of fact, I ended my dissertation on the role of religion in a small Calvinist Dutch village with a sentence in which I aired this rather radical materialist viewpoint (Verrips 1978). In order to be able to defend my bold opinion against attacks, I collected quotes from a host of scholars working in various disciplines and active in different epochs that seemed to support it in an unambiguous way (see Thomson 2008). Of course, the famous statement "*ohne Phospor keine Gedanken*," by the nineteenth-century Dutch physiologist Moleschott, was among my top ten. The absolute number one, however, was the statement by anthropologist Charles Laughlin and psychiatrist-and-anthropologist Eugene d'Aquili:

> There is no level of reality intervening between *Homo sapiens* as a biological phenomenon and that organism's environment. In other words, human behaviour is the result of a dialectic between the central nervous system, primarily the higher cortical functions, and the environment. All other asserted or posited levels of reality have analytic status only.
>
> (1974: 196)

Both scholars propounded that the days of the traditional concept of culture were numbered: that it had to be drastically redefined, if not disappear altogether, for it inhibited the development of cultural anthropology into a nomothetic social science based on a unitary theory of human evolution and behavior. Heavily influenced by modern structuralism, as developed by Lévi-Strauss and others, social scientists envisioned a theoretical synthesis based on insights gained in a series of disciplines, such as anthropology,

linguistics, cognitive psychology and neurophysiology. I was fascinated by their new approach, which they baptized *biogenetic structuralism*, for it seemed to imply, at least in my view, a farewell to the kind of disappointing "culturological" and mentalistic perspectives that had dominated anthropology in the 1960s and 1970s, which completely ignored the relevance of the physical body and what went on inside this entity for what went on between bodies. At long last, some anthropologists seemed to have taken Marcel Mauss' call to take (the techniques of) the (physiological functioning) body seriously by placing it center stage.[1] It is true that a few years before Laughlin and d'Aquili launched their outspoken materialist theoretical views, Mary Douglas had already presented her ideas about the relevance of the body in society and, even more importantly, as a symbol for society. However, she did not really take into consideration what the biogenetic structuralists emphasized: that is, the neuro-anatomical and neurophysiological make-up of the body and how this was related to the behavior of human beings towards each other and the environment in which they lived. The latter wanted to discard such "unscientific" superorganic notions as "mind" or "reason," because they were misleading, and instead directly concentrate on the study of neuroanatomical (or more specifically: "dendritic-axonic-synaptic") configurations in the brain. "Great," I thought, "at long last we will get rid of the Cartesian split that has haunted us for so long, and work in the direction of a much more realistic monistic stand!" What was especially appealing in this connection was that Laughlin and d'Aquili stated that not only modes of "thought," "reason," "cognition" and "sciencing," but also "mythologizing" and "magical causation," i.e. religious phenomena *pur sang*, are "actually the behavioural equivalents of internal, neurophysiologically structured, and systematic channels of sensory association and processing of the human brain, as well as of the brains of other organisms" (1974: 196). In my enthusiasm I even forgave them for overlooking an article by Lévi-Strauss on shamanistic curing in which he dealt with a "rapid oscillation between mythical and physiological themes, as if to abolish in the mind of [a] sick woman the distinction which separates them" ([1949] 1967: 188), an issue to which I will return in Section II.[2]

Though I soon developed doubts with regard to the reductionist perspective sketched by Laughlin and d'Aquili, I cannot deny that it held me in a firm grip for some time. The main reason for my enthusiasm was the fact that I was raised in a staunch orthodox Calvinist milieu, like so many people in the Netherlands, where a sharp distinction was made between body and mind: where the flesh, on the one hand, was associated with a lack of reason, with distracting and therefore negative emotions, and in its wake with abject practices called "sinful"; and where the mind or spirit, on the other hand, was associated with the promising presence of reason and

rationality, the imprisonment of all kinds of irrational feelings, especially sexual and aggressive ones, and the inclination to behave as if these feelings did not exist. Though I managed to say goodbye to this rather depressing type of Protestantism, I guess that it was due to this strongly dualistic, ocular-centric and reason-oriented religious background that I later developed a keen interest in alternative ways of perceiving the relationship between body and mind, especially monistic ones. So, my temporary embrace of the materialist approach of the biogenetic structuralists was rooted in my religious background and my wish to find an alternative to the gloomy dualistic and morally loaded world-view with which I had grown up. I had had enough of the idea that the body and the mind were separate entities, that the former was inferior and the latter superior, and I started to look for scientific perspectives that emphasized a more balanced and integrated relationship, preferably a monistic one, such as that of the biogenetic structuralists. This quest, which brought home to me that there are many varieties of dualistic and monistic thinking with regard to the relationship between body and mind based on the Bible and/or the work of philosophers such as Descartes, is still in progress, as the remainder of this chapter will show. It sometimes reminds me of the quest for the Holy Grail—but this time not outside but inside our bodies.

Though it is tempting to sketch right now the nature of the doubts that I developed with regard to biogenetic viewpoints in particular, and radically monistic perspectives in general, I will first present a short section in which I will describe how such approaches, in spite of their evident flaws, inspired me to look in a different but fruitful way at certain religious phenomena by placing the whole body, and not only the brain, at center stage. Thereafter I will concentrate more or less chronologically upon the work of a specific number of scholars, both anthropologists and others, who have over the past four decades tried to tackle the body–mind problem in one way or another. Finally, I will try to make clear what I think or feel with regard to this long-standing yet unresolved issue, the possible consequences that it might have for the kind of research we engage in, especially in the field of religion, the maintenance of borders (between disciplines, for example), and the (im)possibility of adequately reporting about what we study.

Religion and the body

At the end of the 1970s, a number of biogenetic structuralists published a volume called *The Spectrum of Ritual: A Biogenetic Structural Analysis* (d'Aquili *et al.* 1979), which contained a solid article by anthropologist Barbara Lex on the neurobiological aspects of ritual trance. Like a few others at that time, such as Erika Bourguignon (1973), Lex was interested in religion and so-called altered states of consciousness (i.e. possession and

trance). She had written, for example, a most intriguing essay on the phenomenon of voodoo death in which, according to her, bodily processes played a dominant role (Lex 1974). In a sense, Lex was following in the footsteps of scholars such as Neher, Needham, Jackson and Sturtevant, who in the 1960s had studied the effects of rhythmic stimulation during rituals on the functioning of the brain, or the ways in which sounds might trigger altered states of consciousness. However, Lex's approach is much more elaborate, for alongside the functioning of the central nervous system she also took into consideration that of the autonomous nervous system and how both systems through particular "driving behaviors," for example, drumming, singing, dancing, etc., might get bodily tuned in specific ways so that persons start to think, feel, and act in a totally deviant manner. What other anthropologists at the time tended to take as fact needing no further physical exploration and explanation was turned into a problem by Lex, on the basis of her conviction that the behavior of people cannot be fully understood if one ignores the role of (ir)regularities in the neurophysiological functioning of their bodies.

Fascinated by her ideas about the origins and effects of trance, I decided to find out what I might discover by doing a restudy of a spectacular religious movement in the Netherlands in the middle of the eighteenth century (Verrips 1980). This movement, which occurred between 1749 and 1752, had Nijkerk in the province of Gelderland as its epicenter, whence it seemed to have spread to other regions of the country. One of its striking features was that it started with people (especially children, women and elderly persons belonging to the lower classes) behaving as if they were the victims of serious epileptic attacks. They would seem to suffocate, breathe in strange ways, suddenly fall asleep, have spasms, tremble, fall down as if dying, and were subject to all kinds of visions. These were but a few of the physical symptoms from which they suffered, and which caused a huge disturbance in their communities. They stopped eating, cried, sang hymns, and prayed to Jesus, begging him to forgive them their sins and save their souls. Soon this mysterious malfunctioning of the body went hand-in-hand with a kind of religious revival, which was supported by several preachers in the country. They started writing pamphlets in which they interpreted the turmoil taking a religious turn as an exceptional but nevertheless fully acceptable consequence of the dawning insight that a sinner could not gain access to the kingdom of the Lord without believing in the savior Jesus Christ. Many preachers did not consider it abnormal that people should get physically upset when they realized that they might be lost forever. In order to support their viewpoint, they pointed out that people often trembled and sweated all over after receiving bad news. That this realization that if they did not accept the gospel they would go to hell should come to so many people at the same time had to be understood as one of the Lord's unfathomable acts.

Of course, Satan could not stand aside doing nothing, so he also was involved. The result was a gigantic struggle within a great many people to avoid his attacks and be saved. Who ever had heard of the knowledge of misery, salvation and thankfulness ensuing from a "dikbloedig gestel" (thick-blooded constitution) or "beroerde harsenen" (disturbed brains) as some cynics suggested? No, according to the many preachers and theologians who tried to interpret these mysterious happenings in several regions of the Netherlands, this knowledge was the immediate outflow of the Holy Spirit working on the minds of sinners and of the workings of their minds on their bodies. In fact, however, they neglected the many cases in which these physical symptoms obviously preceded rather than succeeded a heightened religious consciousness. In other words, there were and still are good grounds to seriously doubt the one-sided interpretation of contemporary preachers and theologians (as well as that of later scholars who studied the movement from a similar perspective), emphasizing the unique role of the Holy Spirit and mind disturbing the bodies of so many people, and to at least consider the possibility that they were actually suffering from a specific illness. As a matter of fact, the hypothesis that the religious upheaval might have been caused by an illness was even put forward at the time. Skeptical observers suggested, for example, that a serious disturbance of the nervous system—possibly as a consequence of having eaten spoiled meat—had functioned as a trigger for the religious effervescence.

One can imagine that I, who very much sympathized with Lex's neurophysiological approach to trance and altered states of consciousness, felt supported in my quest for an answer to the question of what kind of illness might have troubled so many people. After a careful study of all the physical symptoms reported by contemporary observers, I concluded that ergot poisoning might be a very convincing candidate.[3] An article by Williams (1923) on the *Vailala Madness* among the inhabitants of the Gulf and Purari District (former Australian New Guinea) in 1919, made me think of this possibility. Williams quotes an official who compared the spasms and bodily contortions of the people involved in this famous iconoclastic movement with the St Vitus's Dance (or chorea), later interpreted as a convulsive nervous disease caused by spurred rye (*claviceps purpurea*). Interesting in this connection is that later interpreters of the *Vailala Madness*, such as Peter Worsley, refused to take seriously the suggestion that there might be a direct relationship between the outbreak of a huge influenza epidemic in the area and the sudden upsurge of the movement shortly thereafter. In this case the significance of malfunctioning bodies for the feverish rise of a social body was swept aside in favor of an explanation in terms of native resentment at a social and political position.

This tendency not to take into consideration the biological make-up of human beings and the extremely complex neurophysiological processes

taking place in their bodies, in normal or abnormal ways, when studying their mindscapes, humanscapes, and landscapes, has been dominant for decades in the social sciences. In a sense it was (and as a matter of fact still is) a consequence of the division of labor between the different disciplines within academia. When I concentrated on the biogenesis (or perhaps it is better to say the pathogenesis) of a religious movement, it was not so much my goal to solve the riddle of its occurrence by launching the hypothesis that this was exclusively due to eating fungus-infected rye bread. Rather, I desired attention to be paid to the concept that thinking, feeling, and acting are phenomena that cannot be properly understood if one neglects or even denies that they are in the first and last instance bodily-based processes. Moreover, I wanted to emphasize the necessity of at least attempting to get rid of the Cartesian heritage of leaving the study of the objective (mal)functioning body to the medical sciences and that of the subjective (mal)functioning mind to the humanities (see Strathern 1996: 5). In fact, I dreamt of the advent of a really holistic and ultimately materialistic approach to the variety of human life on planet Earth, which would put an end to the frustrating reign of the deficient and therefore unsatisfactory distinction between mind and matter. This dream has not died, but it has become much tamer and milder over time.

This change is in the first place related to the fact that more and more social scientists in the past decades have developed an interest in studying the role played by both healthy and sick bodies in (trans)forming societies and cultures, as well as in trying to elaborate new perspectives on the body–mind distinction. Reasons for this interesting trend are, for example, the upsurge of new feminisms, changing sexual patterns and the emergence of AIDS, the increasing cyborgization of humans, the decoding of our genetic makeup, gene-therapy and cloning, xeno-transplantation, new reproduction technologies, as well as the development of ever more advanced instruments to scan the body, especially the brain, and the progress in the realm of artificial intelligence.

A second reason for the taming of the dream was a slowly dawning insight that the wish to get rid of the concept of mind might mean throwing out the baby with the bathwater. I will address this later. First, however, I want briefly to sketch how other social scientists have tried to pay more attention to the importance of the body and bodily processes so as to better understand social and cultural phenomena in, for instance, the religious realm pre-eminently associated with the mind and the metaphysical.

Body–mind in anthropology

To my knowledge, Claude Lévi-Strauss was one of the first anthropologists to seek to relate body and mind in a way that foreshadowed the manner in

which certain anthropologists are currently trying to connect them: that is, by taking into consideration what is going on at the deep level of the central and autonomous nervous system. In the thought-provoking article I referred to earlier, on the shamanistic cure of a sick woman by a Cuna Indian (Panama), he not only argues that this cure can be compared with a psychoanalytic session, but also that, just like such a session, it might stimulate

> an organic transformation which would consist essentially in a structural reorganization, by inducing the patient intensively to live out a myth—either received or created by him—whose structure would be, at the unconscious level, analogous to the structure whose genesis is sought at the organic level.
>
> ([1949] 1967: 197)

What Lévi-Strauss tried to make clear is that a pre-eminently symbolic phenomenon such as a myth, here presented to a patient by a shaman, (probably) has an "... 'inductive property,' by which formally homologous structures, built out of different materials at different levels of life—organic processes, unconscious mind, rational thought— are related to one another" (ibid.). He got the inspiration for this idea about the possible effectiveness of particular symbolic constellations at a physiological (even biochemical) level from Freud, who suggested that one day neuroses and psychoses might no longer be understood in psychological terms, as well as from research done by neuroscientists in Sweden. What I found and still find striking is the fact that Lévi-Strauss apparently had no problems whatsoever in moving between the different levels that many scholars (both social scientists and philosophers)—afraid of unacceptable reductionism—want(ed) to keep as separate fields of research.

More than twenty years later, Lévi-Strauss wrote a kind of sequel to the article published in 1949: "Structuralism and Ecology." In this piece he explicitly stated that structuralists wanted to reunite perspectives that due to "the narrow scientific outlook of the last centuries" had been considered to be mutually exclusive. To judge from the following excerpt, alongside Hegel, it was Descartes whom he had in mind (*excusez le mot*) as responsible for this outlook:

> [S]tructuralism recovers and brings up to awareness deeper truths that are already latent in the body itself. By reconciling soul and body, mind and ecology, thought and the world, structuralism tends toward the only kind of materialism consistent with the ways in which science is developing. Nothing could be farther from Hegel; and even Descartes, whose dualism we try to overcome while keeping in line with his rationalist faith.
>
> (1973: 23)

Though Lévi-Strauss here explicitly expressed the wish to overcome "dualism," one cannot but conclude that his terminology remained dualistic in the sense that he kept reasoning in terms of a mind–body dichotomy (not only in this article but also in other publications). For, on the one hand, he uses such terms as "mind," "soul," "mental constraints," "mental laws," "thought," "intellect," "perception," "inner logic," "intelligibility," and, on the other, "body," "brains," "senses," "sensibility," "nervous system," "anatomy," "physiology" and "natural foundations" (both of our thinking and perception as well as of the "world," "ecology" or "reality"). So, the kind of language game with which he confronted his readers did not excel in clarity, especially given his failure to define the concepts presented. His use of so many concepts without specification illustrates how difficult it is for anyone interested in integrating levels that have for such a long time been studied separately by different disciplines to express oneself properly. I will return to this issue in the final section.

However, Lévi-Strauss's rather imprecise language use did not diminish my sympathy for his fundamental message. He posits that two determinisms exist: (1) the determinism of the "mind" that structures everything that it receives through both the perceiving senses and the recording "brains," and (2) the determinism of the "environment," "ecology" or more precisely "techno-economical activities" and "socio-political conditions." In other words, Lévi-Strauss is interested in the two-way process between what goes on within the body and what surrounds it. According to him, it concerns a *collusion* that is based on the outside and the inside being structured in a similar way and therefore structuring in a similar way too. In his own words:

> *[N]ature* appears more and more made up of structural properties undoubtedly richer although not different in kind from the structural codes into which *the nervous system* translates them, and from the structural properties elaborated by *the understanding* in order to go back, as much as it can do so, to the original structures of *reality*. It is not being mentalist or idealist to acknowledge that *the mind* is only able to understand *the world around us* because *the mind* is itself part and product of this same *world*. Therefore *the mind* in trying to understand it, only applies operations which do not differ in kind from those going on in *the natural world* itself.
>
> (ibid.: 22, my italics)

I think that it is important to stress that the collusion between inside and outside has not so much to do with content, but rather with the "fact" that both operate according to the same formal properties. The content, or what exactly enters the mind/body, is embodied, and is retrieved when necessary, differs in terms of context and time. It is exactly this idea that formed the

starting point for Lévi-Strauss's gigantic intellectual odyssey through the myths of the South and North American indigenous populations and that enabled him to discover their underlying (binary) logic, a logic that he saw grounded in specific properties of both the body or human nature and the nature with which it is surrounded. That is why structural analysis is not a kind of "gratuitous and decadent game," for it "can only appear in the mind because its model is already present in the body" (Lévi-Strauss 1981: 692). Moreover, it brings to the one who practices it sensations of immense fulfillment "through making the mind feel itself to be truly in communion with the body" (ibid.). Thus, a structural analysis as envisaged by Lévi-Strauss not only reveals in the last instance "profound organic truths," but also generates, in so doing, a series of most agreeable bodily experiences.

I find these observations interesting for two reasons. In the first place, because they show that the concept of mind as used by Lévi-Strauss is just a designation for the potential of the body to generate and process what one calls knowledge about, for example, itself and the world of which it is a part, what to think and feel about these entities as well as about how to behave towards them. It is not a ghost in a machine, but a not-yet-decoded powerful and crucial facet of specific physiological and biochemical processes which we call "mind" and about which we reason, for the time being, in psychological terms and as if it were something ethereal. In the second place, I deem Lévi-Strauss's observations with regard to the sensation of unity of mind and body when he engaged in structural analyses very interesting, for they remind me of what some scholars have said about religious sensations, namely that they temporarily erase the distinction or gap between subject and object, in this case not so much between mind and body, as between self and world.[4]

To conclude my short exposé on the thoughts of the godfather of structuralism, I want to stress the fact that he developed a perspective on the relation between body and mind that implied no clear-cut distinction, but rather their complete integration at a physical level. Moreover, I want to underline that he, contrary to popular belief, took the body and especially what goes on within it more seriously than many anthropologists and sociologist who also placed the body on center stage.[5]

A case in point is Bourdieu. Bourdieu was interested in the question of how "systems of objective relations" or the "observed order" are produced, and therefore designed "the theory of the mode of generation of practices" to enable him to study "the *dialectic of the internalization of externality and the externalization of internality,* or, more simply, of incorporation and objectification" ([1972] 1977: 72). As part of this theory, he launched the notion of *habitus*, i.e. "systems of durable, transposable *dispositions*," that were the result of the internalization, incorporation or embodiment of external social structures. Though the body figures large in Bourdieu's work —for it is with the body that people read the "book" from which they learn their

vision of the world, to use his own metaphor—it contains no passages in which he tries, as Lévi-Strauss did, to include knowledge about the (mal)functioning body at organic levels. One looks in vain for sections dealing with how the physical body is (un)able to incorporate externality first and to externalize it later. That is all taken for granted by Bourdieu.

Significant in this connection is a footnote in his famous book *Outline of a Theory of Practice* in which he (ibid.: 202–03) contrasts his own position in a succinct but revealing way with that of Lévi-Strauss. The latter is, in Bourdieu's view, not the kind of radical materialist one might think, for his philosophy of mind (claiming that it is a functioning *thing* with an architecture in which images of the world are inscribed) turns out to be nothing other than a kind of idealism stressing the universality of logical categories. The crucial difference between him and Lévi-Strauss, so he states, consists of the fact that he is interested in the dialectic relation between the embodied "structured, structuring dispositions," or the habitus, and social structures, whereas Lévi-Strauss ignores this, because he is focused on "establishing a direct, unmediated identity between mind and nature" and therefore neglects "everything covered by the concept of habitus." Schemes of thought and logical categories are not universal, for they correspond to the social world and not to the natural world.

What I find striking is the emphasis in Bourdieu's sketch on differences between his outlook and that of Lévi-Strauss's, and the lack of any effort to look for possibilities to expand his theory by integrating certain elements from Lévi-Strauss. One reason to do this would be the fact that both scholars were heavily influenced by the ideas of Durkheim and Mauss on the origin of classifications and the role of the social and physical body. Where Lévi-Strauss became interested in the formal operations of the mind, brain or minded body without which the disturbing socio-cultural variety in the world might never be properly understood, Bourdieu instead concentrated on the ways in which the interplay between bodies and different social structures resulted in different kinds of habitus (and thought schemes). Both scholars placed the body center stage, but with one fundamental difference: Lévi-Strauss included its physical functioning in his studies and tried to relate mind with matter, while Bourdieu excluded this biological dimension and did not bother much with matter and mind. To formulate it in a somewhat exaggerated way: whereas the former tried to build bridges between the language games of different disciplines, the latter developed no serious efforts in that direction. This is a pity, for it might have led to a more encompassing theory of practice.[6] In a certain way, one is left in the case of Bourdieu with the somewhat uncomfortable idea of a socially-molded body that molds in its turn without having the slightest notion of how the body as a physical entity influences, directs, or limits this double molding process. In this respect he missed a chance to supplement his theory with certain elements from that of

his counterpart, for instance, the idea that the physical body (also) seems to structure what it embodies: that is, the social structure.

However, this criticism does not mean that I do not appreciate Bourdieu's ideas about embodiment and habitus. On the contrary, they have a great heuristic value, not least for scholars with an interest in religious ideas and practices, for these ideas and practices get embodied, anchored in the flesh in such a way that one sometimes can recognize certain believers (such as staunch Calvinists or orthodox Muslims) from a distance and make prognoses about their behavior in all kinds of contexts. Their bodily tuning, for instance, in a kinetic and proxemic sense, represents, so to say, a specific Gestalt that can trigger implicit knowledge and feelings—both negative and positive—about less visible forms of such a tuning, for example, of their emotional make-up and ways of thinking, even of the nature of their sensorium. The wide variety of condensations of spiritual matters in the body and the manner in which they might function as beacons for others in society form an almost inexhaustible field of research. That, however, is another point.

Both Lévi-Strauss and Bourdieu have inspired many social scientists to pay more attention to the role of the body and its relation to what we call mind in socio-cultural settings.[7] Together with others, the former, for example, gave the impetus to the rise of biogenetic structuralism that once fascinated me so much, whereas the latter stimulated several sociologists and anthropologists to elaborate his ideas of embodiment and habitus. Csordas (1990), for instance, wrote an influential article in which he presented embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology. Alongside Bourdieu's theory of practice, Merleau-Ponty's theory on perception formed his source of inspiration in developing this paradigm. According to Csordas, the former had been successful in letting collapse the duality between structure and practice, and the latter that between subject and object, by invoking embodiment as a "methodological principle." This collapsing, so he states, "requires that the body as a methodological figure must itself be nondualistic, that is, not distinct from or in interaction with an opposed principle of mind." Merleau-Ponty solved this problem by seeing the *body* as "a setting in relation to the world" and *consciousness* as "the body projecting itself in the world," whereas Bourdieu solved it by seeing the (socially informed) *body* as the "principle generating and unifying all practices" and *consciousness* as "a form of strategic calculation fused with a system of objective potentialities." The former summarized this collapse of body and mind in the concept of *preobjective* and the latter in that of the *habitus*. Though both scholars shared the paradigm of embodiment, they articulated their positions "in the methodologically incompatible discourse of phenomenology and ... dialectical structuralism," according to Csordas, whereupon he starts with the *tour de force* of developing "a nondualistic paradigm of embodiment for the study of culture," making use of the two concepts mentioned in

analyzing "the empirical domains of religious experience and practice" (Csordas 1990: 8–13).

However, contrary to the expectations raised, his article does not end with the presentation of a convincing nondualistic paradigm. Csordas' text raises serious doubts as to whether he has actually solved the Cartesian split. First, because Csordas seems to overlook the fact that his source of inspiration Bourdieu, in just being silent about the mind when writing about embodiment and habitus, only creates the impression that the mind disappeared in or merged with the body (or the habitus), where, on closer inspection, it does not. In fact, the mind emerges in such expressions as "schemes of thought." It is further revealing that the index of Bourdieu's book does not contain an entry "mind" and that the already mentioned footnote which I addressed above can be read in such a way that one might even think that "mind" is the equivalent of either "the social structures" or the "structured, structuring dispositions" (alias, the habitus).[8] In the second place Csordas' claim is debatable because he frequently uses expressions that immediately remind one of the split: of the mind *and* the body.

Though he emphasizes the relevance of the body and embodiment, the body he writes about is certainly not the material, biological body, but just a peculiar mixture of a philosophically conceived and a socially informed body. His interest in the material body is limited to a series of visible and audible corporeal expressions and does not include the deep structures and processes that make these expressions possible. For he explicitly states that physiological explanations of, for example, glossolalia, in terms of trance or altered states of consciousness do not take us very far, if we want to understand these bodily states "as *modus operandi* for the work of culture" (ibid: 32). However, the fact that without physiological processes this work of culture would not be possible at all seems a logical reason not to set them aside so easily. Moreover, their genesis is often triggered by cultural means (e.g. culturally specific driving behaviors or manipulations of the sensorium, such as the production of certain types of sounds and rhythms that tune the body) and with the explicit intention of losing oneself for a while in a world in which normal feeling, thinking, and acting are replaced by something different. A kind of temporary ritual rebellion against "what thought has made of life" (Lévi-Strauss 1981: 681).

Though I am impressed by Csordas' effort to launch embodiment as a paradigm for anthropology (why not for other social sciences?), I regret his putting the physical body between brackets. I therefore doubt his claim of succeeding in collapsing the duality of body and mind—at least in the sense of Descartes' *res extensa* (material body) and *res cogitans* (immaterial soul, mind)[9]—by introducing the concepts preobjective and habitus. We are left with the riddle of the role of the physical body in packing and unpacking all kinds of so-called cultural stuff at the deep level of physiological and

biochemical structures and processes. One might even say that Csordas' denial of the relevance of these processes and structures for a better understanding of cultural phenomena is just another "proof" of the fact that this packing and unpacking is of a binary nature, as Lévi-Strauss suggested. We seem each and every time to be the victims of the dualist tricks of our physical body, for if we replace a dualism for a monism we are left with a new dualism: in Csordas' case with *physical body: bodymind.*[10]

A splendid illustration of this new type of dualism in anthropological circles is, for instance, presented by Michael Lambek in his illuminating article: "Body and mind in mind, body and mind in body: some anthropological interventions in a long conversation" (1998). He makes it clear that the Cartesian split remains, if one reasons from the perspective of the mind about the relationship between body and mind, but that it collapses if one starts reasoning from the body with regard to this relationship, for there is then a sort of "split unity," that is, a mindful body or bodymind. This view is very much inspired by Csordas' ideas about embodiment, thus indirectly by Merleau-Ponty's notion of the preobjective and Bourdieu's habitus concept. Lambek illustrates the usefulness of Csordas' paradigm with a case history on the possession of one of his informants, Ali, who switches from Ali to The Sailor and behaves during his possession by this demon according to his habitus. Like Csordas, Lambek also neglects in the analysis of this case the physical manipulation or specific tuning of the body as an effect of heavy smoking and drinking. He also ends up with a culturalist view on the in- and ex-corporation of a specific model of performance during a possession session. No attempt is made to consider the riddle of how the physical body makes this temporary transformation in identity possible. It is just assumed that the body (or better: the mindful body) is able to do such things: that is, retrieve stored information and store it again in its dark crevices until it is retrieved again. The body is nothing less and nothing more than a molded–molding instrument (agent or even actor) producing culture, whose constantly transforming make-up is left as an object for study to other disciplines, such as the neurosciences. Though I can understand this attitude, which rests on a deep fear of being accused of unacceptable reductionism, I consider this to be a pity, for it means that one robs oneself of an opportunity to include previously neglected facets of human feeling, thinking, and acting.

Over the past two decades ever more social scientists have developed an interest in the inner workings of the body, more especially of the brain, and have wondered how the insights of neuroscientists can be integrated into their discourses on social and cultural phenomena. After the rise of the sick body, the socially informed body, the temporarily differently tuned body, the nonverbal or proxemic and kinesthetic body, the sensorial body and the tattooed body as fields of interest, it now seems to be the turn of the neurobiological body to appear in the universe of social scientific discourse.

After the pioneering efforts of scholars such as Lévi-Strauss, Laughlin, d'Aquili, Lex, and Hufford to direct attention to this kind of body, it now enjoys a rapidly increasing popularity among anthropologists (see Reyna 2002) and sociologists (see Watson 1998),[11] not least among those with an interest in religion.[12] It may be that this remarkable trend has something to do with the fact that neuroscientists conduct research on the effects of drugs (both legal and illegal) and physical damage on the (mal)functioning of the body, especially of the brain, and every now and then engage in seeking materialistic explanations for so-called spiritual phenomena such as Out of Body and Near Death Experiences.[13] However, what is more important is the question of what kind of enriching insights this heightened attention for the neurobiological body has brought us so far, for instance, with regard to the process of embodiment of cultural phenomena or the good old Cartesian split. In the first place, it has led to a lot of debates between "believers" in a neurobiological turn of the social sciences and "skeptics."

A good example of such a debate is that between Edward Slingerland, on the one hand, and Francisca Cho and Richard K. Squier, on the other, in the *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* (2008, 76[2]: 375–457).[14] The former is of the opinion, that "the mind is the body, and the body is permeated through-and-through with mind" and that "consciousness, under this understanding, is not a mysterious substance distinct from matter, but rather an emergent property of matter put together in a sufficiently complicated way" (Slingerland 2008a: 378). He criticizes social constructivism, because it accepts "human-level structures of meaning ... as possessing ontological status," instead of conceiving them as "grounded in the lower levels of meaning studied by the natural sciences" (ibid.). For this reason, he defends "a vertically integrated approach" or reductionism and a return to Darwinism. Thirty years ago the biogenetic structuralists aired similar views, but Slingerland does not refer to their work. Cho and Squier agree with Slingerland that it can be useful to apply the tools of cognitive science to, for instance, religious phenomena and that human beings can be seen as integrated mind–body systems, but they have great difficulty in accepting the idea that physical reductionism and/or the philosophical assumption that the world consists of nothing but matter. They point out that the language of many scientists including that of Slingerland often suffers from vagueness and lack of content and that the idea that we are nothing but matter is "irrelevant, at best, or an *a priori* justification for killing people, at worst" (Cho and Squier 2008a: 413).

The linguistic critique of Cho and Squier shows a great family resemblance to that of neuroscientist Bennett and philosopher Hacker on the language use of modern brain neuroscientists (as well as that of many psychologists and cognitive scientists). According to Bennett and Hacker, the members of the first two generations were still working in a Cartesian

tradition distinguishing a body and a mind and ascribing psychological attributes to the mind, but the members of the third ascribed these attributes to (parts of) the brain (Bennett *et al.* 2007: 15). This third generation is fond of showing via neuro-imaging and related techniques, how specific cells of the brain "do things," "interpret," "interact," etc., as if they were conscious little human beings. In their discourse, the cells have taken the place of the homunculus once invoked to make clear what went on in our brains. Bennett and Hacker argue that this ascription of psychological properties to the brain is senseless, for in their Wittgensteinian vision only human beings as a whole, and not their parts, can feel, think and (inter)act. Anyone who does not understand that "*The brain is not a logically appropriate subject for psychological predicates*," is falling prey to "the mereological fallacy," that is, the tendency to ascribe attributes to parts that only are valid for a whole, and is therefore producing strictly speaking ... nonsense (ibid.: 21ff.).

Though I find the radical critique of scholars such as Cho, Squier, Bennett and Hacker interesting, it does not convince me in several respects. Let me briefly touch on one point: that is, the fact that we will never be able to escape from the insufficiency of our language to designate exactly our experiences of and insights into ourselves and the world that surrounds us. In the meantime, we can only try to find less inadequate or more precise words and sentences to describe and analyze them. In this respect, social scientists with an interest in incorporating the knowledge of the neurosciences find themselves faced with the problem of how to integrate the often imperfect language in which this knowledge is phrased into their own imperfect language games or discourses.[15] However, the fact that such an endeavor is an inherently risky and tricky one and may lead to inadequacies should not prevent us from at least engaging in it. Otherwise we will miss a chance to develop a more complete view on how socially (in)formed bodies function in both negative and positive ways as parts of the social bodies to which they belong. In this respect I fully agree with Watson's advice addressed to sociologists, "that they will need to understand, at a general level, how culture comes to inhabit a biological organism" (1998: 24).

So much for the debates and my view on the sides taken. What about the Cartesian split? Where are we with regard to this old and fundamental problem since the advance of the cognitive and neurosciences? Is it gone, as I once wished and Csordas seems to claim, or is it still alive and kicking? If one looks at the terminology deployed, such as the mindful body, and the language used by scholars with different disciplinary backgrounds propagating materialist perspectives, one cannot but conclude that the split is still with us. It is there, however, in a changed sense, for the mind is by many of them no longer perceived as a kind of immaterial property of a living body, but under the influence of technologically very advanced neurological research, especially of the brain, as solidly grounded in the physical body of

human beings. The word "mind," has, in other words, become a term that refers to not yet decoded, extremely complex material processes in our bodies that regulate the transformation of physiological and biochemical events, in, for example, our brain, into thoughts, memories, stereo-metrical images and language and vice versa. It has become a term that is not yet fragmented into components of the material complexities to which it refers, but that will not disappear because we need it in order to denote the chain of processes as a whole. In order to convey a somewhat clearer idea of what kind of processes I am hinting at, the best comparison I can make is to the inextricable relationship between invisible binary digits and visible images. So I end up maintaining the concept of mind because I realize that we need it to speak of those not-yet-deciphered intricate material processes responsible for our consciousness of ourselves and the world in which we live. It now even seems silly to me that I once wanted to get rid of the concept because I felt that it referred to something immaterial, metaphysical, and even of divine origin. Doing away with the mind would have robbed me of the possibility of denoting the awe-inspiring, complex material processes that were foreshadowed in the immaterial meaning of the concept so familiar to us, and that perhaps at some future point will be decoded.

Religion and belief

Having made clear my view with regard to the mind–body problem, I want to sketch briefly what this might imply for the study of religion from a more materialistic perspective. My main point is that the great interest of social scientists in the body so far has not led to many serious efforts to include the physical body in their perspectives. In fact, the physical body is generally speaking still put between brackets by them: mostly out of fear of falling into a reductionist trap, which might eventually mean the disappearance of the identity of their discipline. If one reads their work, one is struck by the fact that they stop short just where the real challenge begins: that is, in understanding more of the physical embodiment process, the ways in which the dispositions one talks about become anchored in the flesh and what that might mean for their malleability, transformability, and durability over time. Everybody acknowledges the fact that the deterioration of the physical bodies of elderly people can lead to serious disturbances in their ways of thinking, feeling, and acting, in short to an increasingly messy socially informed body with increasingly messy behavior in its wake. However, as long as deterioration processes do not explicitly manifest themselves in these fields, the physical functioning of socially (in)formed bodies is overlooked as irrelevant for social and cultural behavior. What can come into focus, if one follows my view, is that certain types and manifestations of so-called social and cultural behavior, for example, when they significantly

deviate from those which people have learned to in-corporate, might trigger serious disturbances at a physical level in socially (in)formed bodies to such a degree that their owners become unreasonably intolerant, even outspokenly aggressive and violent on the rebound.

This can be observed in *optima forma* in the sphere of religion and belief, phenomena associated as almost no others with the world of the immaterial, metaphysical, and the divine or the mind, the soul and the sacred. I think that this kind of lopsided classification and evaluation of religion and belief at the side of an immaterially conceived mind, at least in the Western world, is one of the big mistakes of our time. It would also be better to perceive religion and belief as physically embodied phenomena and the sometimes very violent reactions to confrontations with deviant representations of dogmas and imagery as efforts both to defend bodily grounded metaphysical truths and, in doing so, to maintain a socially informed physical integrity of self and society. That belief is firmly ingrained in the body (or the mind understood in a material sense) comes in a telling way to the fore in the case of blasphemy, when offended people talk in terms of feeling ill or being hurt in such a way that they have to vomit. When they use such expressions this is not just metaphorical language, but language that hints at fundamental experiences in the flesh as a consequence of being touched by, for instance, imagery outside the body that is entirely in opposition to imagery stored inside their bodies (see Verrips 2008). If we want, for example, to develop more encompassing insights into the physical background of this kind of language use by believers as well as that of mystics trying to express their often very physical experiences with divine entities, we need to cross the borders between disciplines. Then it is necessary to retune ourselves or to "exorcize" from our bodies the idea that consulting the work of scientists who try to solve the riddles of the mind and body in a materialist fashion cannot be relevant for social scientists and will eventually lead to a misplaced use of their technical language and unacceptable forms of reductionism. Neither needs to be the case, if we remain critical with regard to both. In this respect I fully agree with Ozawa-de Silva, who wrote: "If one shifts the boundaries and expands the conceptual possibilities, ... the nature of the field itself changes, not necessarily to deconstruct its very real achievements, but to show other and fresh directions beyond those so far pioneered" (2002: 37).

Notes

1 Though Mauss emphasized the necessity of the socio-psycho-biological study of certain phenomena, such as the techniques of breathing in generating mystical states, he himself never made such a study (see Lyon 1997: 90/91). For further discussion of his essay, see chapter 1 in Lyon (1997).

2 In their later publications the biogenetic structuralists even developed an outspokenly negative attitude towards Lévi-Strauss's work, because they saw him

as a representative of "semiotic structuralism," which was considered to be "essentially dualistic" and denying "the role of action (associated, of course, with the body and the physical) in the ontogenesis of structures" (Laughlin *et al.* 1993: 161). If they had read his work better, they might not have written this, as Lévi-Strauss provides much evidence that he takes the physical body very seriously.

3 This approach shows a great family resemblance to the experience-centered study of supernatural assault traditions in North America by Hufford (1982).

4 Noteworthy in this connection is Lévi-Strauss's perspective on the relationship between thought and ritual. Whereas thought "creates an ever-increasing gap between the intellect and life ... ritual is ... a reaction to what thought has made of life," a way back to reality (1981: 681). Against this background one might say that carrying out a structural analysis was for him as much an intellectual as a ritual activity.

5 I need to emphasize here that Lévi-Strauss's attention is focused almost exclusively on the mind or the brain as an instrument of reasoning; he does not pay much attention to the role and influence of emotions in co-shaping the thought and life of human beings as do some contemporary philosophers (see Nussbaum 2001).

6 By his efforts to occasionally cross the boundaries of language games, Lévi-Strauss showed that he was not afraid of a careful kind of reductionism, whereas Bourdieu seemed to shun such efforts (see Bourdieu [1972] 1977: 120), which is why he remained in a certain sense the prisoner of what neurophilosoper Churchland has called "folk psychology" (1986: 299).

7 See, for overviews of the diverse range of studies of the body that sprang up in the social sciences in the twentieth century, Synnott (1993: Ch 9) and Strathern (1996).

8 He writes: "the dialectic of the social structures and structured, structuring dispositions – or, in a more eighteenth-century language, of mind and nature" ([1972] 1977: 202).

9 See Descartes ([1649] 1996) for a succinct overview of the distinction between body ("corps") and mind ("l'âme"), their different functions ("fonctions") and the manner in which they act on each other ("Comment l'âme et le corps agissent l'un contre l'autre").

10 See for a similar kind of critique, Strathern (1996: 177–86). Though Strathern devotes much attention to scholars who seriously tried to take the physical body more seriously, such as Ernest Rossi and Mark Johnson, he also ends up with a rather empty body as far as its internal functioning is concerned.

11 See Fabrega (1977) for an overview of early work on the relation between culture, behavior and the nervous system. "*ZYGON Journal of Religion and Science*" is an important platform for articles on the neuro-scientific study of religious and spiritual phenomena.

12 See, e.g., the œuvre of Harvey Whitehouse.

13 However, see McCauley and Whitehouse (2005) who suggest that it was due to calls from anthropologists and others that neuroscientists developed an interest in studying religious phenomena.

14 The correspondence in the order it occurred is as shown below:

Slingerland, Edward (2008a) "Who's Afraid of Reductionism? The Study of Religion in the Age of Cognitive Science," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(2): 375–412.

Cho Francisca, and Richard K. Squier (2008a) "Reductionism: Be Afraid, Be Very Afraid," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(2): 412–18.
Slingerland, Edward (2008b) "Reply to Cho and Squier," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(2): 418–20.
Cho, Francisca, and Richard K. Squier (2008b) 'He Blinded Me with Science': Science Chauvinism in the Study of Religion," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(2): 420–49.
Slingerland, Edward (2008c) "Response to Cho and Squier," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(2): 449–55.
Cho, Francisca, and Richard K. Squier (2008c) "Reply to Slingerland," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76(2): 455–57.

15 See Lévi-Strauss (1971: 642/43) for an interesting view on the relation between the natural and physical sciences, on the one hand, and the social sciences, on the other, concerning their different dependency on symbols in their "apprehension of reality."

2

Object theory
Toward an intersubjective, mediated, and dynamic theory of religion

Gordon Lynch

In the Introduction to this book, David Morgan proposes an understanding of belief as "a shared imaginary, a communal set of practices that structure life in powerfully aesthetic terms" and as "a pervasive community of feeling" (p. 7). Morgan's challenge to the preoccupation with narrowly confessional and propositional understandings of 'belief' in the study of religion reflects an established critique of such notions of belief within anthropology (see, e.g., Lindquist and Coleman 2008). But in my own discipline of the sociology of religion, such narrow conceptions of belief persist both in terms of the emphasis on survey data measuring respondents' attitudes to creedal statements (see, e.g., Voas and Crockett 2005), and the use of interviews to try to elicit the core beliefs and spirituality of those within and beyond institutional religion (see, e.g., Hunt 2003; Smith and Denton 2005). The persistence of such propositional understandings of belief—even in the face of evidence that they make little sense to research respondents (see, e.g., Smith and Denton 2005: 131)—makes David Morgan's grounding of belief in socially shared practices and aesthetic regimes a welcome corrective. For those involved in the sociological study of religion, this current volume offers important concepts and methods for taking seriously the significance of embodiment, aesthetics, space, practice, and materiality for religious belief. This has the potential of helping us to build much richer accounts of religious and secular subjectivity than accounts of religious meaning-making based on the personal creeds that research participants are able (or often not able) to narrate to us. Morgan's concept of belief as a "pervasive community of feeling" generated through the sedimentation of practices through time can also be usefully linked to other concepts in social and cultural theory such as Raymond Williams' view of culture as a "structure of feeling" (Williams and Orrom 1954), Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) concept of "habitus" and Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of the recursive reproduction of social structures. Engaging

with these wider theories can generate further conceptual tools for thinking about how modes of belief are contested and change through time, the relationship between belief, social distinctions and social capital, and the relationship between agency, practice, and structure.

There are also important questions still to explore in relation to Morgan's understanding of belief. Thinking about belief as emerging out of sedimented material, social and aesthetic practices does not account for forms of belief which are disconnected from any practical religious life. Abby Day's (in press) qualitative study of belief among people in northern towns in the UK has provided evidence of respondents who claimed to believe in Christianity, while not adhering to orthodox Christian beliefs or engaging in any form of ritual Christian practice. In this context, professions of Christian belief were a particular kind of identity-work, connected to wider assumptions about what it meant to be white, morally decent or part of a particular family tradition. In the complex circulation of ideas about religion in contemporary culture, "belief" can therefore become detached from the practices and aesthetic regimes of particular religious communities, and become a tool for constructing a particular kind of identity. Such uses of religious belief are still grounded in a particular embodied and situated life-world—for example, the experience of growing up as a white teenager in a former mill town in which there is a large, segregated Muslim population. But these life-worlds may involve little, and often no, contact with what we would conventionally think of as religious communities and practices. We may therefore need to remain open to alternative forms of belief to those identified in Morgan's framework.

Regardless of this minor qualification, Morgan's theory of belief represents a valuable approach for making sense of the formation and performance of religious subjectivities across a range of historical and cultural contexts. This chapter builds on his model by paying particular attention to the role of embodied, mediated, and dynamic relationships with sacred others (gods, spirits, saints) in the practice of religious belief. More specifically, I want to examine how concepts drawn from psychoanalytic theory might help us to take these relationships more seriously as social and cultural phenomena, in ways that help us to make connections between the psychological worlds of individual religious adherents, their social, material and cultural context, and the sacred others with whom they relate. Before exploring these ideas in more depth, though, it will be useful to think briefly about the failure to take seriously this relational dimension of religion within the sociology of religion.

The relational nature of personhood

The unquestioned status of propositional models of belief within the sociology of religion arguably reflects a lack of theoretical discussion within this

field about the nature of the person as a social agent. A common default position is to emphasize the autonomous, reflexive individuals striving to construct their own religious belief-system and lifestyle which becomes the center for their way of acting in the world (see Berger 1967; Luckmann 1967; Wuthnow 1998; Roof 1999; Hoover 2003; see also Giddens 1991). From this perspective, the autonomous, reflexive self is an expression of particular structures and processes in late modernity, which include the effects of cultural pluralism in promoting awareness of choice, the possibilities presented by the expansion of higher education and media and the emergence of a lifestyle, consumer culture. Yet at the same time, a slippage can occur within these discourses of the autonomous, reflexive "spiritual consumer" in which it is implied that this form of selfhood is such an inevitable and universal consequence of the all-pervasive effects of late modernity that it becomes the ontological condition of the contemporary self. The observation that, under certain quite specific historical and cultural conditions, some people find themselves needing to make reflexive choices about the meaning and structure of their lives shifts to the Sartrean existential claim that we are all condemned to freedom and choice.

The ontological claim that we exist as autonomous individual selves, acting out of the meaning-systems that we reflexively construct, fails to do justice to significant aspects of our personhood. An emphasis on individuality fails to recognize the ways in which our lives are embedded and negotiated through networks of relationships with family, partners, colleagues and friends, as well as through face-to-face, mediated or imagined relations with other communities and groups. The exercise of choice—removed from the commitments, emotions, memories, possibilities, aspirations and constraints associated with these relationships—is a rare phenomenon. We are—quite literally, in developmental terms—relational beings before being autonomous, and whatever autonomy we experience in our lives is always nested within our relationships. Similarly, the idea that we act as social agents from the center of our belief-systems fails to do justice to the more complex motive-forces that shape the conduct of our everyday lives. These include the unconscious, desire, habit, the logics of local practices (i.e. our practical consciousness of how to act in specific contexts), our need to maintain acceptable performances of self-presentation, cultural norms, and the ways in which our material environment shapes our imaginations and actions. "Belief"—in the sense of propositional beliefs about the meaning of life—may therefore play little role in the practical conduct of our lives from when we get up in the morning until we go to bed at night. Claims about the ontological status of the autonomous, reflexive self may be powerfully buttressed by neo-liberal discourses that valorize individual choice in political, economic, and social life, by legal structures protecting individual human rights, and by longer movements and traditions that have generated the

subjective turn in cultural life.[1] But these larger ideological, cultural and political movements represent interventions in the broader normative question of what kind of society and culture we should seek to build rather than necessarily providing adequate descriptive models of how we practically live as social agents. Relational models of the self that provide richer accounts of the nature and basis of human agency beyond notions of individual reflexivity and autonomy are therefore needed if we are to understand more clearly the nature of lived religion.

The sacred object

The theory of relations with sacred others that I will explore here forms part of this project of trying to develop a richer understanding of the significance of subjectivity and relationship in lived religion. My starting point with this is the idea that some forms of religious belief entail faithful interaction with, or in relation to, sacred objects. This idea involves a dual understanding of the meaning of "object". The sacred object is, on one hand, an object in a material sense, encountered by the adherent through processes of social and aesthetic mediation. As Birgit Meyer (2006: 15–16) puts it, "Mediation objectifies a spiritual power that is otherwise invisible to the naked eye ... thereby making its appearance via a particular sensational form dependent on currently available media and modes of representation." Without such everyday mediation of the sacred through material and sensory forms, sacred objects experience a social and cultural death like the old gods who formerly inhabited the Pantheon in Rome. At the same time, the sacred object is also an object in a psychological sense, more specifically as understood within psychoanalytic object relations theory. This is to say that a sacred object is a dynamic focus for subjective associations and feelings in the mental world of the religious adherent and that the relationship with the sacred object can affect the psychological structures and feeling-states of the adherent. The chapters in this volume already give considerable attention to the material forms of the sacred object, and so I will focus more here on the psychological understanding of the sacred object, as well as saying something about how the psychological and material connect.

To think of the sacred object in terms of object relations theory opens up both significant possibilities as well as complexities for our theorizing of lived religion. Object relations theory—or more accurately, object relations theories—have played an increasingly central role in psychoanalytic theory and clinical practice in recent decades, marking a shift away from classical Freudian drive theory towards a focus on the psychological significance of our experiences of inter-personal relationships. The diversity of theoretical approaches within the object relations school, however, means that the concept of the "object" can have different meanings in the work of different

theorists. These concepts also function within wider theoretical narratives which offer sometimes different, sometimes overlapping, accounts of the process of psychological development in early childhood and the significance of such early processes for later adult functioning. Given this complexity, it is unrealistic to imagine that an object relations perspective on the sacred object is easily defined at present. While there has been a growing literature exploring religious belief and experience from an object relations perspective, much of this provides a somewhat problematic basis for any approach to the study of lived religion which takes seriously historical processes of social and cultural mediation (as we shall explore shortly). This means that a more developed object relations framework for theorizing sacred objects may well need to go beyond those writers who have undertaken more explicit and detailed work on object relations and religion, to examine the work of other object relations theorists whose attention to religion is less well developed. The contribution of object relations theory to the sociological and cultural study of religion therefore requires much further clarification, and the following observations are intended as preliminary markers for this project.

Within object relations perspectives on sacred objects, a broad distinction may be made between approaches that understand the sacred object as a transferential phenomenon and those which think about the sacred object as a transitional phenomenon. Transferential theories of sacred objects interpret such objects in the context of broader patterns and structures of transference that individuals demonstrate in their relations with others and which they have learned through their early experiences with care-givers. For example, James Jones (1991) argues that the way in which individuals experience their relationship with God reflects patterns of transference deriving from early childhood, which will also be evident in their other current relationships. The experience of a childhood lived with a dominating and controlling care-giver may then produce patterns of passivity and dependency in a person's adult relations, as well as a sense of passivity in relation to a dominating and critical God. In this sense, the God-object can function as the blank screen *par excellence*, upon which an individual's patterns of transference are most clearly projected. Although the individual's imagined relationship with a sacred object may reflect one's wider patterns of transference, some theorists would also argue that the God-object has particular properties which mark it out as different from the other object relations that a person forms. Ana-Maria Rizzuto (1979), for example, argues that a person's understanding of God may indeed be initially constructed out of fragments of early experiences of relations with care-givers, but that the God-object plays an important, on-going role in grounding a person's sense of self and purpose. Furthermore, Rizzuto argues that the God-object is not necessarily unchanging, but can be subject to different understandings and

patterns of relationship throughout an individual's life-course. Indeed, if a person's imagined construct of God remains inflexible, it is likely to become problematic as that individual negotiates new psychological or developmental crises, and without some adaptation, a person may abandon an image of God as too painful or irrelevant.

Another model for a transferential understanding of sacred objects, based on the self psychology developed by Heinz Kohut (1984), examines the ways in which a relationship with a divine "selfobject" might affect the psychological structures and feeling-states of an individual. Kohut proposed that selfobject transference was activated in relationships in which an individual experiences the other as a powerful source of mirroring, kinship or focus for idealization, and that such transference was important both in childhood and adult life in shoring up the healthy psychological "self." Within this transferential theory, then, it is possible to ask how a person's relation with God functions in such selfobject terms, both in his or her childhood development and his or her ability to negotiate psychological tensions in later life. How might, for example, an understanding of an empathic, mirroring God act as a source of consolation, or a powerful idealization of God serve as an inspiration and source of energy, in the face of a person's sense of depression or anxiety?

What these transferential models of the sacred object share in common is an interest in the ways in which a person's object relations with God are similar to, and in some respects different from, object relations with other people. Given the psychoanalytic emphasis on the importance of early experience in establishing patterns of transference, they also focus on how such early experiences shape subsequent experiences of God, both in terms of providing the content for images of God as well as generating psychological conditions in which a God-object might later be experienced as persecutory, irrelevant or consoling.

The interest that such transferential models show in thinking about the sacred object in person-like ways is potentially of considerable value for understanding lived religion. There are, however, significant limitations with such models at present. A common concern within this literature is with object-representations of, and transferential relations with, God. While case material in this literature offers rich accounts of individuals' early family experiences, their subsequent life histories and significant relations, and the feelings and meanings they attach to God, only negligible accounts are given of the religious communities and practices through which relations with that God have been formed. This literature typically treats 'God' as a self-evident religious category, failing to reflect in what ways this assumed notion of God is a culturally and historically-specific concept deriving from Christianity or natural philosophy—or indeed from the traditional Freudian critique of religion.[2] For approaches to the study of

lived religion that take seriously the specificities of the contexts in which people form relations with sacred objects, as well as the specificities of those sacred objects themselves, the concept of a generalized, de-historicized, and de-contextualized "God-object" is problematic. To treat "God" or the sacred object simply as an analytic blank screen to receive the individual's transference projections is to neglect the ways in which the meanings and associations attached to a particular sacred object are inscribed by historical and social conventions or, as we shall see later, shaped by wider institutional projects and operations of power. Similarly, to suggest that the content of a person's image of and relationship with a sacred object is determined by their experiences of early care-givers risks a reductionist emphasis on early experience that neglects the ways in which an individual's understanding of their relationship with a sacred object may be informed primarily through interactions in adulthood (see Miller 2008: 290ff.).

An alternative object relations framework for thinking about the sacred object is to conceive of it as a transitional phenomenon. This approach is particularly influenced by the work of Donald Winnicott on the significance of transitional objects and transitional space for the child's developmental process of perceiving and engaging with the external world. The transitional object is a material object in the external world—such as a soft toy or blanket—onto which the child projects an imagined bond that serves as a source of continuity and soothing. Importantly, though, the materiality of the object ("it must seem to the infant to give warmth, or to move, or to have texture, or to do something that seems to show it has vitality or reality of its own," Winnicott 1971: 7) gives the child an experience of a meaningful connection within their inner world with an object that is recognized as being, in some sense, not them and offers an early experience of a form of subjectivity beyond the self. The transitional object does not represent a wholesale engagement with the external world "as it is" by the child, but the creation of a particular kind of object that is at the same time both external and infused with imagination and which therefore occupies a distinctive transitional space that is neither wholly within or wholly external to the child. Writers such as Rizzuto (1979) and Meissner (1984) have argued that the God-object can be understood as such a form of transitional object which unlike soft toys or comfort blankets can retain a particular kind of emotional significance throughout adult life. This is a significant distortion of Winnicott's ideas, however, in which the transitional object functions only at a particular stage in early childhood development before becoming de-animated. Winnicott's work does provide another way of thinking about sacred objects as transitional phenomena, however, in which religious life is seen as a later expression of the human capacity for infusing external objects with intense creativity and imagination which was originally forged through encounters with transitional objects. In Winnicott's own words:

> Its [the transitional object's] fate is to be gradually allowed to be decathected, so that in the course of years it becomes not so much forgotten as relegated to limbo. By this I mean that in health the transitional object does not 'go inside' nor does the feeling about it necessarily undergo repression. It is not forgotten and it is not mourned. It loses meaning, and this is because the transitional phenomena have become diffused, have become spread over the whole intermediate territory between 'inner psychic reality' and 'the external world as perceived by two persons in common,' that is to say, over the whole cultural field.
>
> (ibid.: 7)

Winnicott therefore suggests that religious life stands in direct continuity with the capacity for illusion learned in childhood, where the term "illusion" does not mean "false" but a state in which external reality is infused with subjective imagination. He comments:

> I am therefore studying the substance of *illusion*, that which is allowed to the infant, and which in adult life is inherent in art and religion, and yet becomes a hallmark of madness when an adult puts too powerful a claim on the credulity of others, forcing them to acknowledge a sharing of illusion that is not their own. We can share a respect for *illusory experience*, and if we wish we may collect together and form a group on the basis of the similarity of our illusory experiences. This is a natural root of grouping among human beings ... It is assumed here that the task of reality-acceptance is never completed, that no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate are of experience which is not challenged (arts, religion, etc.). This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the play area of the small child who is "lost" in play.
>
> (ibid.: 3, 18)

In Winnicott's terms, then, the capacity for relationship with a sacred other in adult life might be understood not so much in terms of transferential patterns of relationship formed through interactions with early care-givers, but in terms of the human capacity for deep imaginative engagement with external objects which remains part of the unresolved task of negotiating external reality beyond the self. Significantly, Winnicott also recognizes the social dimension of such imaginative processes, thus providing a conceptual framework that might help us to connect inner experiences of relations with sacred others and processes of social mediation with other people which help to maintain such "illusory experience." The important role that material culture (toys, blankets) play in the early development of such an imaginative capacity also points to the way in which the imaginative engagement with

sacred others in adult life might also be materially mediated (see also Meissner 1984: 180–1), as well as the ways in which material objects might play an active role in evoking psychological states within the individual (Bollas 2009). Such a transitional model offers a potential basis for enquiring how this imaginative capacity is enacted and mediated in specific historical and social contexts through particular media and practices. This makes it more possible to analyse the relationships between adherents and their sacred objects in ways that are more contextually sensitive than purely intra-psychic models of the God-object rooted in early experience.

With some critical revisions, transferential and transitional models of sacred objects may therefore both illuminate our understanding of belief as faithful interaction with a sacred other. Moving beyond the propositional beliefs of the autonomous and reflexive self, a theory of the sacred object can therefore help us to understand the everyday constructions of religious life-worlds as fundamentally relational (involving interactions with sacred objects and other adherents), mediated (both materially and socially) and dynamic (in that they have direct effects on participants' psyches).

Sacred objects, sacred subjects?

If object relations theory offers potentially valuable insights for making sense of lived religion, then more recent developments in psychoanalytic thought raise further questions about how we think about sacred objects. Since the early 1980s, there has been a growing interest among some theorists and clinicians in the development of a relational model of psychoanalysis which takes more seriously the intersubjective nature of the analytic relationship (Mitchell 1988; Skolnick and Warshaw 1992; Mitchell and Aron 1999). This relational turn has focused on the significance of the analyst's own subjectivity for the therapeutic process, rather than thinking about the analyst simply as recipient of the patient's transference. Clearly this raises particular issues in relation to clinical practice. But some theorists have used this relational turn in psychoanalysis to ask wider questions about the nature and implications of the individual's capacity to recognize another person as an equivalent yet separate center of subjectivity, "a mind that is fundamentally like our own but unfathomably different, and outside our control" (Benjamin 1995: xii). This has opened up new ways of thinking about human ontology which attempt to examine how human subjectivity is fundamentally constituted through intersubjective interactions, an interest shared by others working in philosophy, social theory and developmental psychology.

We noted earlier in our discussion that to see the sacred object simply as a blank screen *par excellence* for the psychological projections of the religious adherent is problematic because it fails to recognize the meanings that have been inscribed on sacred objects in particular institutional and cultural contexts. But it

may be possible to move even further beyond this point. The relational turn in psychoanalysis rejects the notion of the analyst as blank screen because it fails to recognize the significance of the analyst's own subjectivity. But is it possible that sacred objects, with whom adherents form emotionally charged relationships, could also be thought of as having some form of subjectivity? Could we think not so much in terms of sacred objects, as sacred subjects with whom some form of intersubjective encounter is possible? To raise these questions might appear to open up only a metaphysical conversation which is the professional domain of philosophers and theologians. But questions of the subjectivity of sacred others can also be explored to some extent within the framework of social and cultural theory, and in doing so, may generate concepts that are more attentive to the intersubjective ground of lived religion.

Attempts to theorize subjectivity have become increasingly important for a range of academic disciplines with the turn to new forms of critical social and cultural thought since the late 1960s (Blackman *et al.* 2008). While this theoretical debate is contested and unresolved, it is increasingly structured around three concerns: subjectivity as a site of subjection or engagement with subject-positions available in a given context, subjectivity as a site of experience, and subjectivity as a site of agency. Contemporary theoretical accounts of subjectivity are therefore often attempts to understand how individuals interact with discourses of self-hood available to them in a given context, how such interactions relate to embodied, aesthetic experiences of being in the world, and what kind of agency underlies the distinctive ways in which individuals engage with their social context and experience their worlds.

Does this broad framework for thinking about subjectivity give us any grounds for conceiving of sacred others as subjects in their own right? This will require a fuller discussion than is possible here, but in brief I would argue that it is possible to think in terms of some form of sacred subjectivity demonstrated by gods, spirits, ancestors, and saints, and to think of these sacred others as sites of subjection, imagined experience, and agency. As we have discussed, sacred others are subject to the ways in which adherents symbolize them, and different social and institutional mechanisms legitimize and perpetuate particular ways of talking about and interacting with that sacred other. The nature of what subject-positions are legitimate for a sacred subject can clearly be contested among their adherents, as histories of religious orthodoxy and heresy demonstrate. But sacred others remain subject to the ways in which adherents narrate them through sedimented and evolving structures of religious discourse recursively reproduced through various religious practices.

At the same time, sacred subjects might also be thought of as exerting a form of agency. This is not the same kind of agency demonstrated by empirically observable human beings, but then there are reasonable grounds for arguing that our concepts of agency need greater refinement than the intentional actions of individuals and groups. As Bruno Latour has argued,

in the context of actor-network theory, anything that "modifies a state of affairs by making a difference is an actor", and agency can be attributed to anything that "might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on" (Latour 2005: 71–2). Although Latour is thinking here about seeing material objects and environments as exerting agency in social life, there is no reason in principle why such agency might not also be attributed to sacred subjects. The sedimentation of religious narratives and discourses around particular sacred subjects means that adherents learn to encounter these subjects with the expectation that the sacred other will relate to them in certain ways—as a source of healing, moral challenge, forgiveness, power, hope, blessing, and so on.

The experience of the sacred subject acting in these ways is not generated simply within the imagination of the individual adherent, but is made possible by the ways in which a wider group of adherents narrates and interacts with the sacred subject. Similarly, the collective of adherents is not free to narrate the sacred subject in any way that they wish, but encounters that subject through sedimented and evolving patterns of discourse that extend back into the past and into a wider imagined community of faith in the present. As a consequence, the individual adherent experiences the sacred subject as having a life and reality beyond themselves. As Durkheim ([1912] 2001) observed, this sense of being addressed by a reality beyond the self is an intrinsic element of the human experience of participation in society, and thus of the social mediation of the sacred subject. Following Latour, the material forms through which the sacred subject is mediated also set their own possibilities for adherents' interactions with them. Again, the contemporary community of the faithful encounters the sacred subject as a force beyond itself, because the sacred subject is made real through the historical sedimentation of spaces, practices, and discourses about that sacred other that stretch beyond it (ibid.: 18). The significance of (and anxieties around) forging a relationship with that past are demonstrated both in the importance of claims about the authentic maintenance of that past as a key rhetorical tool of religious legitimation (see, e.g., McCutcheon 2005), as well as the energies that religious communities invest in imagining and reconstructing that past through ritual, pilgrimage and narrative.

Through the energizing effects of history, materiality, and society, channelled through the expectations and interactions made possible through particular patterns and media of religious discourse and practice, the sacred subject is encountered as a force and presence beyond the immediate lives of the individual adherent or gathered community of the faithful. The sacred subject brings with it its own conditions of encounter, thus authorizing, allowing, encouraging, suggesting, influencing, blocking, making possible, forbidding, in ways that are not simply under the control of adherents. Sacred subjects are subject to the ways in which adherents narrate and interact with them, but sacred subjects also set conditions in which such

narrations and interactions take place. This agency is not simply the property of the sacred subject, then, but emerges through the interactions between adherents and the sacred subject. This might encourage us, as Schofield Clark (in press) has suggested in another context, to think about agency not so much as the property of specific individuals or technologies but of complex social systems in which limits, possibilities, stasis, and changes occur through cycles of interaction and feedback involving people and their relational, material, and imagined environments.

The question of whether the sacred subject can be understood as a distinctive site of experience is perhaps hardest to think about in social scientific rather than metaphysical terms. But even here there is scope for reflection. It may make little sense for the social scientist to speculate on whether Jesus or the orisha is feeling or thinking something in a particular religious interaction, but it is important in this context to note that adherents can work hard to generate a sense of the contents of the inner world of the sacred subject. For example, the public discourse of Evangelical prayer meetings places a strong emphasis on painting a picture of what God is thinking and feeling in the immediacy of that gathering of the faithful (Campbell *et al.* 2009). As social scientists, we may not think of sacred others as possessing subjectivity analogous to human subjectivity, but we should be interested in the fact that adherents imaginatively construct those sacred others as separate centers of subjectivity and think about the implications of such experiences of religious intersubjectivity.

In summary, it may be helpful not to think of sacred others as sacred objects or as sacred subjects, but as both objects and subjects. As Jessica Benjamin (1995: 7ff.) has suggested, both theories of object and subject relations can be valuable in understanding different kinds of psycho-social process rather than us necessarily being forced to choose between one framework or the other. Sacred others, therefore, can be understood as objects in the sense of being the focus of adherents' transference, as internalized and dynamic representations within adherents' psyches, or as animated through the human capacity for deep imaginative engagement with external objects. At the same time, sacred others may be thought of as subjects in that the subject-positions they occupy and the kinds of influence they exert on adherents' lives are not simply the product of the immediate projections brought to the sacred other by a specific individual or group. Sacred others therefore have a kind of separate life, formed through past histories of discourse and mediation, which pre-exists the contemporary adherent and provides the context within which any relational encounter with that sacred other is possible.

Between heaven and earth

This discussion so far has been theoretical, noting omissions in understandings of the person as social agent within the sociology of religion and

exploring the value of psychoanalytic concepts for a relational model of lived religion. In the final part of this chapter, I will build on these theoretical observations further by discussing them in relation to one of the most important recent books to have adopted an intersubjective approach to the study of religion, Robert Orsi's *Between Heaven and Earth* (2007).

A cultural history of twentieth-century American Catholicism, Orsi's book innovatively weaves together narratives about members of his own family with broader narratives about social, cultural, and religious changes during that period. It also breaks important ground in reflecting on the significance of the relationships that American Catholics forged with sacred others—various saints, guardian angels, Mary and Jesus—suggesting that "one challenge of writing about religion is to figure out how to include figures of special power as agents in history and actors of consequence in historical persons' lives and experiences" (ibid.: 2). Such relationships, he adds, "have all the complexities – all the hopes, evasions, love, fear, denial, projections, misunderstandings, and so on – of relations between humans" (ibid.: 2), and attention to concrete examples of such relations demonstrates the ambiguous and ambivalent effects of such sacred figures in the lives of their adherents.

Orsi's work clearly demonstrates how the trajectory of individual biographies leads people to form intense attachments to particular sacred others. One of his uncles, Sal, who suffered from cerebral palsy, became attached to Blessed Margaret of Castello, who was born in 1287 with a number of physical disabilities, and abandoned by her family, only to be adopted eventually into a Dominican order of lay-women. Orsi's grandmother, Giulia, was similarly said to have a special love for the Tuscan saint, Gemma Galgani. In both instances we can see the emotional work that is being done through such relations with sacred objects. In Kohut's terms, Sal and Giulia find in their respective saints an experience of mirroring and kinship—Sal in Margaret's experience of disability and disempowerment and Giulia in Gemma's suffering at the hands of the men to whom she was bound—in which their own suffering is understood and held by a more powerful, sacred presence. These are not simply private psychological experiences, however, but socially and materially mediated. The experience of Margaret and Gemma as living sacred subjects in Sal and Giulia's lives was made possible by the material mediation of these saints through pamphlets and pictures which could be kept in special places in the home. Such experiences of relationship with sacred subjects also rely on wider forms of social mediation, for example, in the groups of people who campaigned for Margaret and Gemma to be canonized and who commemorated them through different media. These identifications are not therefore private, inner experiences, nor, despite their potentially beneficial emotional effects, are they necessarily wholly healthy. As Giulia's case demonstrates, devotion to Gemma Galgani brings not only the comfort of identification with a sacred other,

but also subjection to the role of passive, pious female suffering at the hands of more powerful men.

Orsi also demonstrates how the formation of such relations with sacred others takes place in the context of wider institutional projects. One case in point is the conscious attempt to nurture children's relations with sacred subjects. Childhood relations with sacred others were not then, simply, an outworking of an intrinsic instinct for a "God-object" (or other sacred intermediaries), but produced in an institutional context in which children were disciplined into relations with sacred others through the use of particular material objects, spaces, and bodily practices. In part, such disciplining took the form of the training of the imagination, the social construction of transitional phenomena identified by Winnicott, through encouragement by priests, nuns, and other teachers, enabling children to engage imaginatively with their own chosen patron saint, or their guardian angel. Such disciplining also made use of material objects through structured religious play such as building a Christmas crib or make-believe masses using props bought from specialist Catholic suppliers, again designed to evoke a particular kind of sacred imagination. Such disciplining also took material form in children's own bodies through careful training for their participation in sacred ritual (e.g. children being rehearsed in incomprehensible lists of sins to perform in the confessional, or being taught how to comport themselves during Mass), itself supported by a range of material media such as magazines, posters, and cartoons that sought to encourage correct behavior.

The energies poured into forming children in relations with sacred others reflect the particular significance that children held as being themselves material media of sacred presence for the wider Church. As symbols of innocence and dependence, children were taken to be emblematic of the human condition before God, and physically displayed as such in ritual settings (e.g. through the display of altar boys). Orsi observes that this reflects a wider tendency in the Church to make use of those who are vulnerable and dependent—whether children, women, or "cripples"—as suffering symbols of God's grace. In this context, then, people were not simply encouraged and enabled to forge relations with sacred others through material objects. But some kinds of bodies were themselves constructed as material media of divine presence to the supposed edification of the wider community of the faithful (e.g. the faithful, patient suffering of the "cripple," given by God to show the shallowness of this life compared to the world to come) and therefore became particularly important sites for interiorizing relations with sacred subjects. The forging of relations with sacred others is not, therefore, some kind of personal psychological process, shaped only by experience of early care-givers, but also framed by wider institutional projects. The interiorization of relations with sacred others, made possible through material objects, spaces, and bodily practices, is thus run through both with personal

significance—of individuals' hopes, anxieties, fears and desires—and wider institutional practices of power.

As Orsi is careful to observe, though, such intersubjective relations between heaven and earth are neither simply good or bad, but ambiguous and ambivalent, and provide examples both of the deployment of institutional power and successful resistance against this. The care and interest shown to Sal by other Catholics in his neighborhood, which gave him some kind of social life, were also run through with the project of constructing those with physical disabilities as "faithful cripples." Yet in his devotion to Margaret of Castello, Sal also found a connection with a sacred presence that allowed him to resist this project to some degree, allowing him the opportunity to express his anger at the social marginalization that Margaret and others had suffered at the hands of the Church and wider society. Similarly, having one's body positioned as a special site of sacred significance—for example, in the case of children displayed at Mass—also conferred on such people the capacity to disrupt these sacred imaginaries, spaces, and practices. The plentiful media on training children to participate in Mass was therefore also accompanied by articles and cartoons devoted to deploring the bad behaviour and dishevelled appearance of children in sacred rites.

Orsi's work therefore provides a rich account of the intersubjective, material and dynamic nature of the construction of American Catholic life-worlds, demonstrating the value of careful fieldwork for developing and refining our theoretical concepts. His work shows the complex interplay between personal biographies, particular networks, spaces, and practices of social and material mediation, and wider social and institutional structures and power. As such, it provides a model for future work that is more attentive to the intersubjective nature of lived religion, and demonstrates how taking seriously the experience and construction of relations with sacred others can form an integral part of the social and cultural study of religion.

Notes

1 We could also add to this list the powerful status that cognitive theories continue to occupy within the human sciences (see, e.g., Henriques *et al.* 1998: xff.)

2 The attempts by writers such as Rizzuto and Meissner to develop psychoanalytic accounts of how a God-object might form part of healthy psychological functioning are explicit attempts to critique Freud's understanding of the pathological roots of religion and the illusion of God. It is also worth noting, in passing, that in Meissner's (1984: 182) work there is also a post-Vatican II disdain for popular uses and meanings of Catholic material and visual culture and a preference for a more universal concepts of God.

3

Materiality, social analysis, and the study of religions

David Morgan

The study of religion has always included attention to the material traces of the past. Western archeologists and art historians since the eighteenth century, for example, have carefully scrutinized pottery shards, coins, figurines, jewelry, architectural ruins, frescoes, and altarpieces. The interpretation of things is not new in the study of religion. Yet what has changed among scholars is the reason for studying religion as well as the practice of defining religion(s). Anthropologists and sociologists in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries focused on "primitive" or "archaic" societies for the study of religion since they took a generally evolutionary approach, famously championed by David Hume in his study of the history of natural religion.[1] The premise was that human history evinced a universal tendency to progress from simple toward complex forms of belief, specifically from animism to monotheism. It was a model that favored the present and, not incidentally, underscored the Western imagination's regard for its superior role in a colonial global landscape (Masuzawa 2005).

Not only has the cultural politics of the study of religions shifted, so too has the object of study and the interpretive frame deployed to scrutinize the object. Victor Turner noted a very telling turn in anthropology that is, I believe, symptomatic of several disciplines and fields in the humanities and social sciences over the past forty years or so. The emphasis in anthropological theory, he observed shortly before he died in 1983, had moved "from structure to process, from competence to performance" (1988: 21). And, one might add, from rational cognition to embodied practice. It is not difficult to discern in the sentiment his approval of turning the corner on the intellectualism of structuralist accounts of ritual and myth, where knowledge makes people cultural participants, establishing their "competence," that is, the ability to act meaningfully in a society. Turner elaborated on his observation in formulating an anthropology of performance:

> Performances are never amorphous or openended, they have diachronic structure, a beginning, a sequence of overlapping but isolable phases, and an end. But their structure is not that of an abstract system; it is generated out of the dialectical oppositions of processes and levels of process. In the modern consciousness, cognition, idea, rationality, were paramount. In the postmodern turn, cognition is not dethroned but rather takes its place on an equal footing with volition and affect.
>
> (ibid.: 80)

Turner was convinced that the dynamic character of social experience was lost to the approach that stressed rationality as the key to human sociality. He did not propose an irrationalist scheme to replace modernity. For him, postmodernism represented a change in sensibility that would allow anthropologists to strike an appropriate balance between thought, will, and feeling. Setting aside the nomenclature of the postmodern, I would like to affirm his quest for integrating cognition with the other dimensions of human existence. Indeed, cognition itself is more than intellection. As we will see, studies in neurobiology, which Turner himself hailed at the end of his career, have suggested that emotions, movement, and gesture are integral aspects of human cognition (ibid.: 156–78). We think and remember with feelings and with our bodies. And performance, as Turner argued, is one of the most fundamental ways in which cultures operate. But what does this mean for the study of religious material culture?

Leading themes in the study of religions and their material cultures

Changes in why scholars study religions and what they understand themselves to be studying have accented a variety of themes in scholarship. I would like to summarize them here, not with the intention of treating them exhaustively, but to sketch their principal characteristics and to indicate their significance for the study of religious material culture. I denote five discrete, but clearly interrelated themes in scholarship that have come gradually to the fore in recent decades: (1) the felt-life of belief; (2) embodiment; (3) space and ritual; (4) performance and practice; and (5) aesthetics. Examining each of these will allow us to make a few summary remarks about material culture as an approach to the study of religions. I propose to examine each topic by discussing select primary studies and arguments associated with each. I make no attempt at a comprehensive review of literature nor even at enumerating the major contributors to each niche of research.

The felt-life of belief: emotion, feeling, sensation

Interest in the relationship between emotion, or the passions, and religion is old. In the eighteenth century, David Hume noted the connection in his *Natural*

History of Religion, where he argued that the first glimmer of a divinity occurred when humankind considered the prospect of life beyond "the present course of things." This realization was propelled by hopes and fears such as "the anxious concern for happiness, the dread of future misery, the terror of death, the thirst of revenge, the appetite for food and other necessaries" (Hume 2007: 38–9). William James also discerned the powerful interweaving of belief and emotion. In *Varieties of Religious Experience* he wrote that feeling was "the deeper source of religion" than "philosophic and theological formulas" and he devoted an entire chapter to "Religion and Neurology" (1961: 337). Psychologically framed views of religion and emotion such as those offered by Hume and James were designed to explain the utility of belief, to help account for the work it performs in human psyche or society. Modern neuro-science has continued along this path in a number of ways such as measuring states of consciousness during meditation, as in the case of Buddhist monks.

But for the study of religious material culture, it is important to begin with the scientific claim that emotions are not an ornament of consciousness, but are inseparable from it. Rather than something added to the bare facts of empirical sensations, like frosting on a cake, emotion is intrinsic. For example, researchers have found that "when consciousness is impaired so is emotion" (Damasio 1999: 16). Indeed, emotions participate in the most basic mechanisms of human consciousness, serving two fundamental functions: producing a reaction to a stimulus and regulating the state of the organism in order to respond to the stimulus (ibid.: 53–4). Emotions code memories and are intimately associated with their recall. Moreover, Antonio Damasio cites investigations that show how "emotion is integral to the process of reasoning and decision making."[2] He also points out that emotions are fundamental to the experiences that exert the greatest influence on human behavior: pain and pleasure, reward and punishment, approach and withdrawal. On the basis of these, he unsurprisingly suggests that emotions are "inseparable from the idea of good and evil."[3]

This suggests that human beings exist within landscapes of feeling. By feeling is meant an emotional state of awareness, an internal sensation of sadness, happiness, fear, anger, surprise, or disgust. Damasio adds to this list what he calls the secondary or social emotions of embarrassment, jealousy, guilt, and pride; and the background emotions of well-being, malaise, calm, and tension, which are manifest as mood because they color an object rather than serve as one themselves (Damasio 1999: 50–1). He distinguishes feelings and emotions, arguing that feeling an emotion is the experience of emotions "in juxtaposition to the mental images that initiated" the neurobiological process (Damasio 1994: 145). So feelings arise from consciousness of emotions, and are therefore discrete states of awareness. When they see, hear, touch, or taste, human beings experience emotion, use emotion to evaluate and remember their experience, and rely on it in their social engagements as

forms of intelligence. If we fail to recognize this, we miss something fundamental in religions. Many traditions of thought rank feeling and emotion as inferior or even unreliable, but careful scrutiny of such views, such as the position articulated by Plato in his *Republic*, shows that emotions *per se* were not banned, only those considered a threat to the governance of the soul. Plato had Socrates explicitly endorse musical modes and poetic forms that indulged the emotional gravitas that promoted solemn submission to the greater good of the state (Plato 1992: 75, 399b–c). The same must be said of religious traditions conventionally regarded as unemotional. In fact, the emotional range may be comparatively narrow and staunchly policed, but it is rudimentary to the personal and social practices that characterize Puritanism, for example. By denying feeling, humans change their relationship to a person, place, or thing, and construct a practice of selfhood that is grounded in a characteristic pattern of feeling closely associated with time, place, and people. Feeling is something that powerfully joins people into communities (Harré 1986; Lyon and Barbalet 1994; Brennan 2004).

All societies invest a great deal in teaching their members to feel similarly. They rely on collective rituals and practices such as ceremonies, parades, entertainment, and religious rites to do so. Emotions bridge public and private because the neural networks that constitute the internal anatomy of an emotion are linked directly to muscular-skeletal systems. To feel happy, in other words, means to smile; to feel anger is to grimace. We rely on muscles in the face, shoulders, and chest to confirm that we feel happy. This intimate organic connection is the visual basis for communicating feeling, and works to such a degree that seeing a gesture or expression in another person can trigger the same emotion in us.[4] Being in the overwhelming presence of dozens, hundreds, or thousands of other people who are cheering, weeping, ruminating, fervently praying or singing easily elicits the same feeling, or at least a shared disposition toward the public display of a feeling considered appropriate for the occasion. By the same token, images or objects that circulate among many can serve to unify public feeling or sentiment.[5] What has been aptly termed "emotional contagion" consists of the transmission of feeling by virtue of the "unconscious imitation of physical states" perceived among other humans (Thagard 2006: 244; see also Lundquist and Dimberg 1995). This extends to things in the form of imagery portraying the human face or gesture or to any object that is anthropomorphized such that its emotional quality affects a person who touches or sees the object.

Feelings not only join human beings to one another, but also join them to animals, to living things, to places, and to objects.[6] Feelings can become so intimately associated with external inducers of emotions that the two appear virtually indistinguishable, like Pavlov's dog, which responded to a bell as neurologically identical to the promise of reward. Of course, behaviorist

reductions of human beings to the simplicity of stimulus-response routines are not appealing to humanists engaged in the study of complex cultural phenomena such as religious belief. The point is not to treat humans in simplistic terms, but to recognize the importance of emotion in the connections, indeed, the relationships that people develop with objects, animals, and places. The study of the materiality of religion finds here one of its richest domains of inquiry, especially since traditional approaches have tended to dismiss the cultural biography of things in religious belief as superstitious, idolatrous, low-brow, or primitive. A great deal of research has clearly shown how things matter to believers (McDannell 1995; Hermkens 2005; Pattison 2007).

Embodiment: the body in belief

Bodies convey feeling not as a set of abstract signs, but by a more immediate connection, one that enables emotional contagion. The movement or expression of emotion in a body is conveyed intuitively to companions, often unconsciously and unintentionally. Feeling shapes consciousness at a somatic level, operating in human beings socially as a medium that is not fully subject to rational or intentional control. Panic is only an extreme example of this. More prosaic, but no less efficacious is the way children and students imitate the gestures, expressions, and voices of their parents and teachers without thinking of it. Or the way a massive stream of pedestrians flows down a sidewalk and across a street, able quite intuitively to maintain a collective rhythm, rate, and distance among one another, creating a transient but real social body. This somatic capacity for collective behavior is one reason why corporate worship and ritual are effective; or one might say that they are effective because they are affective. People feel like one body because they are feeling together, conveying attitudes, emotions, and dispositions by means of standing, sitting, kneeling, chanting, singing, or praying together. The body in such cases does more than signify belief: it hosts belief. More than passively enabling it, the body shapes, colors, tunes, tastes, and performs belief. Believers receive belief intuitively from others as embodied forms of imitation, intimidation, and empathy, and then adapt the bodily routine to suit their situation—perhaps to deepen a social bond or to negotiate some degree of resistance or difference. The most obvious example of this complex and varied process is the training of children, whose bodies are the site of instruction no less than their intellects. Seating order, processions, uniform or formal dress, corporate exercises like standing at attention or kneeling in prayer, group recitations, musical and vocal performance, public punishment and praise—all serve as techniques for disciplining the individual body to participate in the social body of belief. The body becomes how individuals and group do belief.[7]

The history of body practices may be studied as constituting ways of believing. How people dress, gather, greet, amuse themselves, eat, and organize their homes reveal their class, their perceived status, their economic aspirations, and what they do that joins them to others. In addition to the preservation of social structure, belief affords the opportunity to study agency in restructuring it. Belief is not only what people do to conform to the limitations of gender roles as set by the prevailing economic demands of producing heirs, promoting authority and social order, or amassing capital. Belief is also what people do to expand their options, to wiggle from strict prescriptions of behavior, or to imagine themselves beyond what they are told they must do or think or feel. When we consider the role of religious beliefs in campaigns for social justice, for example, it becomes clear that belief can assist people in re-creating themselves by seeking new roles, new narratives, by reimaging their social presence, by changing their place within the communities in which they circulate. The body plays a fundamental role in this since it is a principal form of social signage, the public face that people present to their fellows. But it is also always more than signage. It is the seat of experience in the sense that the body registers in feelings and moods what it experiences beyond itself. The body entertains what the face may not expose. Dissimulation and concealment are possible because expression of feeling is not hardwired. This means that the body serves as a hidden interior, which is where many cultures locate an inner self as opposed to a more publicly accessible self or selves.

Bodies also carry history in them, intermingling previous states with the present, intermingling language with feeling. Religious historian Marie Griffith has studied the history of American body cultures and the place that religion has played in the conception of the body and the practices that have shaped and envisioned it (Griffith 2004). In many religions the body is regarded as an index of the individual's relation to the deity or spirit world. Among the Evangelicals whom Griffith has studied, illness and the ailing body are evidence of vice or unbelief; health and beauty the blessing of divine approval. If we are to avoid the pervasive influence of dualism, scholars must attempt not to limit the body to the status of a sign about something else, but scrutinize ways in which it can be the very medium of meaning-making, the site of religion, not only its signification. Griffith's driving concern is to ask how body type "has come to seem a virtually infallible touchstone of the worth of persons about whom one knows nothing else, as well as the value—indeed, the deepest truths—of one's own self: a vital component of subjectivity" (ibid.: 7). The body has become the self, or at least its most fundamental, socially accessible manifestation.

A primary claim in the study of the body today is that there is no essential body, that bodies are historically, culturally constructed. If this is so, then religions have taken an often important part in making bodies. "You are

what you eat," "you are what you look like"—these truisms are abetted by modern advertisement's driving but generally tacit pitch: "you need this commodity in order to be what you really want to be." Religions such as Christianity and Judaism commonly say the same thing couched in the normative discourse of ethical imperatives: "you ought to do this or affirm that in order to be the person whom God meant you to be," which is one reason why many versions of these religions and capitalism cooperate so well (Moore 1994; Einstein 2008). For example, Christian diet and fitness gurus since the later twentieth century have taught that God empowers believers to reduce their weight. Prayer and Christian association bring this about. Moreover, as Griffith argues, "ideal bodies ... perform indispensable work as effective agents of devotional intimacy," that is, being slender and fit are ways in which some Christians achieve and cultivate their relationship with the divine (2004: 161). Their god calls them to be thin and by becoming so, they enjoy a new intimacy with him. At the same time, of course, thin bodies remain key aspects of the social capital of sexual allure, class status, and the arch propriety of gender roles. Religion and power are inextricable.

Space and ritual

As a category of analysis and interpretation, "sacred space" received special attention in the work of Mircea Eliade. In "Sacred Space and Making the World Sacred," the opening chapter of *The Sacred and Profane*, which appeared in English in 1959, Eliade presented a conception of sacred space that he set in diametric opposition to what he held to be the desacralized or profane world-view of the modern, industrial, post-religious age. Durkheim had treated the arch distinction of sacred and profane as a local structuring of difference that was arbitrary but absolute, a compulsory pairing that enforced the difference by taboo (Durkheim 1995: 36–8). Social order was the result. A related narrative construction of signs informed the structuralist understanding of the sign worked out in continental theory most importantly by Ferdinand de Saussure, Roman Jakobson, and Claude Lévi-Strauss. Eliade had something else in mind. For him, entire world-views were either sacred or profane. He spoke in sweeping generalizations of long ages of humanity: "religious man" as primitive or archaic societies, and "profane man" as the inhabitants of modern, Western society. And yet Eliade considered each form of humanity to be suffering from loss, which it was driven to reverse. So-called archaic societies conducted religious ritual as a way of returning to the cosmogonic moment, the gods' creation of the universe, which ritual reenacted in order to effect a return to the mythic origin.

Eliade's approach has been repeatedly criticized in several respects, most especially perhaps his tendency to universalize symbols as common elements in very different, widely separated religious traditions, lifting them

from their immediate circumstances in order to say something about human nature, about "religious man" or "profane man," as if such nebulous essences adequately represented the diversity of the human record. Jonathan Z. Smith wrote one of the most memorable critiques of Eliade in his widely read collection of essays, *To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual* (1987), where he argued against universalizing particularities and, following Durkheim, pushed the analysis of place toward the far more sociological conception of location within hierarchy than the understanding of space as ritual response to the irruption of the sacred into time and space (Smith 1987: 45). Place for Smith is not a reply to the sacred, but the very construction of it. Place is neither what god or nature do, but is rather the product of human thought. "Human beings are not placed," he contends, "they bring place into being" (ibid.: 28). This means that Smith returns the understanding of sacred and profane to the Durkheimian sense of difference:

> A ritual object or action becomes sacred by having attention focused on it in a highly marked way. From such a point of view, there is nothing that is inherently sacred or profane. These are not substantive categories, but rather situational ones. Sacrality is, above all, a category of emplacement.
>
> (ibid.: 104)

Prohibition or taboo not only enforced the difference between sacred and profane, but constituted it.

But in this concept of place, or emplacement, the sensory, the bodily dimension of experience, suffers. Smith glosses Durkheim's view that the indices of the sacred "are to be derived from social rather than sensory experience" (ibid.: 106). Place is not sensory, but rather the scaffolding on which to hang the stipulative message of social organization: "the sacred is here and know your place accordingly." The sacred is a form of information, structuring the social field hierarchically. For this reason, Smith adduces several schematic diagrams, culled from various sources, and interprets them as social maps that the sacred is designed to enforce. This social analysis of ritual is clearly important and unquestionably useful in locating sacred space within the coordinates of time and place. But one must ask what happens to materiality in an approach in which place, or better, social location, is finally not about space but serves as a metaphor of difference, is, in fact, never more than an empty signifier. Place for Smith is a dramatizing of a linguistic system of difference. He remains a structuralist for whom things are symbols in cultural systems.

I do not wish to polarize this approach and one that seeks to maintain the relevance of materiality in the understanding of ritual. Ideally, one would not need to choose between analyzing power as an ontological transformation and power as social construct organizing the field of human relations. People

locate power in things, enter into and cultivate relations with things and places, organize their lives around the experience of things and places. While doing so is always a social activity working within economies and cultural politics, that is not all that religious spaces and things do. Reductionist interpretation threatens to squash particularity no less than does universalist interpretation, and both compromise the robust character of life-worlds, tending to cast them as allegories within the hermeneutic of the interpreter, who presumes to tell us what the rituals "really" mean.

In his brief discussion of "sacred space," Gerardus van der Leeuw expressed the opposite view of the Durkheimian approach:

> Before building is begun it must be quite definitely ascertained whether the place selected is suitable for the "position." This really means that we cannot make shrines and cannot select their "positions," but can never do more than merely "find" them.
>
> (1963: vol. 2: 398)

Finding them means locating their manifestation of what van der Leeuw called the sacred: "Power." The sacred is not constructed by acts of consecration, but exists first as a manifestation of power. According to van der Leeuw, who surveyed ancient religions from around the world, people seek the issue or generation of power for the work it can perform. One cannot say, according to his analysis, that a taboo or ritual consecration creates the sacred by charging an object with power, by setting it off from the ordinary, because the taboo and the consecration are applied to what *already has power*. He used a telling analogy, comparing the taboo in primitive societies to the warning "Danger! High Voltage" (ibid.: vol. 1: 44). The warning sign does not invent the electricity, but is there to draw attention to its power. Cultural analysts need to take religious ritual and material culture with comparable seriousness. Christians, therefore, regard an image of Jesus as compelling or impressive not only because a priest has blessed it or because it was given to them on a ritual occasion, but because they recognize the image as Jesus. His power reaches them in his gaze. Jesus looks at them and they feel his look as a tangible contact. Likewise, an apparition of Mary appears on the side of a building spontaneously. The devout respond by erecting makeshift elements of a shrine, by depositing candles and gifts. In order to understand why, we need to examine the mobility of the sacred, its dynamics of appearance, the role of memory, the unconscious, and the place of feeling in religious life. All of this fleshes out the cultural construction of the sacred in ways that authoritarian acts of taboo and consecration only begin to capture. What we need is the history of practice that people bring to things in order to understand the depth in which their experience of the sacred is rooted.

In a very helpful overview of leading and conflicting accounts of sacred space, David Chidester and Edward Linenthal identified the "divergence between a substantial and situational definition of the sacred," characterizing it as a "contrast between what might be called the poetics and the politics of sacred space" (1995: 6). Without entering into polemics, it is compelling to venture, even only in passing, what an integration of these forms of interpretation might entail. Consider, for example, the *USS Arizona* Memorial, the national monument in Hawaii, discussed by Chidester and Linenthal in their introduction to *American Sacred Space* (ibid.: 3–5). The situational analysis of sacred space would contend that the Arizona is sacred because ritual consecration sets it off from ordinary space, an act of differentiation that is enforced by the prohibition of its desecration. Stress on site as empty signification of difference will rely on prohibition rather than on ethnography and material analysis of what visitors actually experience because the difference itself is telling them what to experience: difference. The real point is *meaning*, not textured or varied experience. Political analysis of sacred space will be much more interested in contestation of control and ownership than in what people report they experience or what the material organization of space inclines them to feel, think, or see. For the politics of sacred space, place is a demarcation, a line in the sand, not a place experienced. But in an approach that integrates poetics and politics (which Chidester and Linenthal urge), sacred space is studied as host to human/divine encounter, aesthetic or felt-knowledge, ritual perception, the tangible experience of nationhood, the affirmation of authority, or, possibly the transformation or realignment of power. The patriotic monument is where American history meets the bodies of visitors, where narrative touches them, where memory becomes personal, where individuality contributes its energy and interests to national stories in order that they may enter into daily life to be remembered, or re-cast. Particular and general meet, changing one another in a renewing synthesis. The social life of things and places is not ignored, nor is the material dimension subordinated to cultural politics. More than political allegory, there is actual content to the sacred that merits analysis and interpretation. And that content is grounded in the body and material practice, where politics and poetics were always already set in tandem.

Performance and practice

Social and psychological thought since the late nineteenth century has made use of the idea of performance as a kind of social dramaturgy of the self, where human selves are understood to play various roles of themselves. For William James, for instance, the human self consisted of three major aspects—the material, the social, and the spiritual "me." James defined the

material me as the body and the clothes, but also those people and places with which one bears intimate physical connection: family, home, and property. The social self is a multitude of roles since "a man has as many social selves as there are individuals who recognize him and carry an image of him in their mind. To wound any one of these his images is to wound him" (James [1892] 1985: 46). According to James, we perform a slightly or dramatically different self-role in the various settings and with different friends or associates each day.

The presentation of self dominated the study of performance among sociologists and social psychologists through the twentieth century and has long been of interest to anthropologists. Likely the most influential writer in this domain has been Erving Goffman, whose major book, *The Presentation of the Self in Everyday Life* (1959), developed the dramaturgical approach in a very broad and instructive way. Goffman approached human interactions as collaborative encounters in which several things tend to happen. A person will project "a definition of the situation when he appears before others," though others, "however passive their role may seem to be, will themselves effectively project a definition of the situation by virtue of their response to the individual and by virtue of any lines of action they initiate to him" (1959: 9). In other words, the participants cooperate more or less (some parties must be coerced, others coaxed, cued, or enjoined by flattery) in working out the framework in which their interaction will take shape. "Together the participants contribute to a single over-all definition which involves not so much a real agreement as to what exists but rather a real agreement as to whose claims concerning what issues will be temporarily honored." This "working consensus" operates as a felt or intuited convention that may with effort be amended, broken, or replaced, though in most encounters, a single agreement governs relations.

Goffman's analysis of performance may be productively applied to the study of belief and materiality, especially with a view to working out an integration of the poetics and politics of the sacred. Because he did not assume that a human self is a unitary essence, but rather, like James, a repertoire of roles regularly performed, his account socializes the understanding of belief, removing it from the domain of abstract doctrine and assent. Belief might be characterized instead as the formation and maintenance of a consensus or community of feeling, in which the self one performs with the community is the self one wishes to be recognized by the deity, spirit, or ancestor. Worship is a presentation of the self—personal and collective—to the divine. As liturgy and most forms of religious ritual clearly show, the divine is not just a passive audience for the performance, but also a participant, even if one beseeched, invoked, conjured, or lamented. Belief is not simply the affirmation of teaching, but the performance of self before the divine other and the community of feeling.

In the final several decades of the twentieth century, performance emerged as a new context for social analysis. For both Goffman and anthropologist Victor Turner:

> The basic stuff of social life is performance ... Self is presented through the performance of roles, through performance that breaks roles, and through declaring to a given public that one has undergone a transformation of state and status, been saved or damned, elevated or released.[8]

Turner sharply distinguished what he considered modernity's spatial imaginary, in which the Cartesian cogito legislated a rationalization of space, regulating time as a linear sequence and organizing space into a homogeneous display of discrete objects, best represented in the visual logic of linear perspective (Turner 1988: 72–4). To this regime he contrasted postmodernity's multi-perspectival consciousness of time:

> The notion of society as an endless crisscrossing of processes of various kinds and intensities is congruent with this view. Time is coming to be seen as an essential dimension of being as well as multi-perspectival, no longer as a linear continuum in spatial terms.
>
> (ibid.: 79–80).[9]

The emphasis on time made performance a powerful lens for studying culture and it facilitated understanding materiality as a process.

Whether or not one wishes to associate the shift from space to time in social analysis with the move from modern to postmodern, Turner rightly draws attention to the paradigm of performance as a way of framing the study of social life that has engaged many scholars in the past several decades. Performance has encouraged the development of a much more robust, less intellectualized understanding of the social construction of reality. Social performance is understood to make public attitudes, to create shared consciousness, to order social fields, to circulate feelings, and thereby to help establish consensus, which may be thought of as the social body of a group. Turner stressed that social dramas are not unilateral, but "crisscrossing," engaging in dissent, opposition, variety, multiplicity. Performances can affirm the status quo or attack it. They may be creative and disruptive no less than routine and reassuring. And a member maintains a felt, embodied connection to the social body by means of performative experience:

> There is a living and growing body of experience, a tradition of communitas, so to speak, which embodies the response of our whole collective mind to our entire collective experience. We acquire this wisdom

> not by abstract solitary thought, but by participating immediately or vicariously through the performance genres in sociocultural dramas.
>
> (ibid.: 84)

Emphasis on participation rather than abstract thought is characteristic of the study of performance and practice, which are comparable, if not quite identical. A widely influential source in thinking about the social dynamics of human behavior, one keyed to the study of practice rather than specifically to performance, has been Pierre Bourdieu. Practice may be very closely related to performance, even almost indistinguishable, if by practice we mean discrete routines of behavior that accomplish a variety of forms of cultural work, including the production and maintenance of social bodies. Perhaps Bourdieu's most important consideration has been the idea of habitus (developed from Marcel Mauss—see Mauss 1973—but as old as Plato and Aristotle), which he understood as "a system of dispositions" acquired over the course of a lifetime, but especially and most influentially in childhood (Bourdieu 1977: 82). By disposition he meant body-practices and sensibilities that incline people to act in a particular way. They are felt-orientations taken up in daily experience by a kind of archive of habits on which people draw in routines and performances. Children are especially active in manufacturing habits. As Socrates asked an interlocutor, "Haven't you noticed that imitations practiced from youth become part of nature and settle into habits of gesture, voice, and thought?" (Plato 1992: 72). Bourdieu certainly agreed, observing that by imitating the bodily actions of others, children produce

> a pattern of postures that is both individual and systematic, because linked to a whole system of techniques involving the body and tools, and charged with a host of social meanings and values: in all societies, children are particularly attentive to the gestures and postures which, in their eyes, express everything that goes to make an accomplished adult—a way of walking, a tilt of the head, facial expressions, ways of sitting and of using implements, always associated with a tone of voice, a style of speech.
>
> (Bourdieu 1977: 87)

The result is a living repository of body schemes or habits that "pass from practice to practice without going through discourse or consciousness." Moreover, given the fundamental lessons of socialization that occur in childhood, during which time the body and self of the child are shaped by the techniques and structures of the life-world in which it has come to exist, Bourdieu believed that the house was "the principal locus for the objectification of the generative schemes."[10]

By focusing on the material organization of the house as the most important site for the formative effects of habitus, Bourdieu helps us think once again about the parameters of objects, props, scenography, body practices, and space (Bourdieu 1970). Although his analysis of a Berber house teeters on the structuralist play of ideas, his study intermingles body and space with language and sign (ibid.: 169). It is becoming clear, and the chapters of this book will confirm it, that the focus of material analysis is not merely the object itself or space understood as the enclosure occupied by objects. Time and action, performance and practice make the study of material culture much more dynamic, stressing both the changes in objects over time, their own biographies, and the role that placement, use, and reception each play in understanding what an object does. It is *material practice* that becomes the actual focal point of study. Objects and spaces are not static, with abstract meanings encoded within them. Indeed, their "meanings" are often not singular or intellectual meanings at all, but rather the stories of their travels through time.[11] The experience of material practice is frequently unintentional, unarticulated, and felt. Often its significance is performance itself, the ritualized sensation of seeing, touching, hearing, or feeling. Asking how to study sensation and how to think of it as broader forms of cognition and social experience brings us to the new instantiation of aesthetics.

Aesthetics

Aesthetics has long been considered the science or philosophy of beauty. But that definition lacks the original, more expansive understanding of the word. In 1735, Alexander Baumgarten coined the term "aesthetic," which he took from the Greek word for perception, *aisthesis*, and in his major work, *Aesthetica*, he defined his new "science of aesthetics" as "the perfection of sensual cognition as such, which is beauty" (Baumgarten 1983: 10). He saw in poetry (and the other arts by extension) the refinement of sensation, inferior to reason, but still a form of thought. Baumgarten contended that the utility of aesthetics would be:

> to make available appropriate materials to the sciences, to adapt scientific knowledge to the intellectual capacity of anyone, to press the improvement of knowledge even beyond the limits of the clearly known, to lay solid foundations for contemplative and spiritual activities and for the liberal arts, [and] to grant a certain superiority in common life under equal conditions to all other people.
>
> (ibid.)

The clearly moral character of Baumgarten's aesthetics and the practical nature of beauty as distilled perception fell by the wayside in the course of the eighteenth century as conceptions of the faculty of taste came to

dominate aesthetic discourse. Insistence on the disinterested nature of aesthetic judgments pushed away from Baumgarten's idea of the useful and pleasing refinement of sensation and toward the social distinction of taste.

Yet in recent years a number of scholars have questioned the post-Baumgarten understanding of "aesthetic" in regard to the study of religious material culture. In each case, they have sought to recognize the role of the body in religious material practice. For example, Simon Colman distinguished the classical notion of aesthetic value from the aesthetic practices of speaking and the use of imagery among the Pentecostals whom he studied in Sweden, contending that "a powerful 'aesthetic' sensibility, a coherent system of recognizing the presence of divinity in the visual and material" was at work in their worship practices (Coleman 1996: 108). In *Visual Piety* (Morgan 1998), I undertook the description and interpretation of an alternative aesthetic of lived religion (ibid.: 22–58; 2003). This aesthetic was not grounded in a disinterested relation of viewers to the image or figure of a deity, for example, but in the very embodied interests of viewers for what the deity can offer them:

> Those who venerate the saint or savior of popular images bring broken bodies to be mended, shattered nerves, and sick children to be healed. The body of the believer is explicitly engaged in what we may call the visual piety of popular religious images.[12]

Encouraged by Michael Taussig's re-reading of Walter Benjamin on mechanical reproducibility, Christopher Pinney has argued that the "disembodied, unidirectional and disinterested vision" at work in Western aesthetics misses the dynamics of visual practices among Indian peasants engaged by mass-produced images of Hindu deities. In order to recover the "mutuality and corporeality in spaces as varied as those of religious devotion and cinematic pleasure" among Indian viewers, Pinney has suggested an alternative critical practice he calls "corpothetics."[13] Brent Plate has aptly urged that the study of religious aesthetics be clearly distinguished from Christian theology and be practiced under the banner of religious studies in order to understand the creative, artistic construction of religious worlds (Plate 2005: viii).

Birgit Meyer has urged the scrutiny of what she calls "sensational forms," by which she means the structures that organize, evoke, and transmit feelings of the transcendent, especially awe and wonder (2006: 10). These are not analogous to the universal forms of intuition described by Immanuel Kant concerning time and space, but culturally constructed forms of sensation or "objectifications" that are especially amenable to mediation, that is, transmission and staging in different media. (This treatment of time and space is in fact indebted to Hegel, not Kant, as Daniel

Miller's description of objectification makes clear: "a process in time by which the very act of creating form creates consciousness" (Miller 2005: 9)). How the forms shape feeling, what manner of experience they stimulate and frame, how different media affect their performance, how the forms change among different audiences and over time are all matters for aesthetic analysis as it is being described here. Meyer encourages critical development in this domain for the study of religious experience in order to "account for its material, bodily, sensational and sensory dimension."[14] In so doing, she is careful to underscore the need for a reconstructed notion of the aesthetic.

Material culture as an approach to the study of religion

Having defined a number of key words (feeling, body, space, practice, performance), I have deferred until now the task of framing what may be the most rudimentary term for this book: material culture. What is it? We might begin with "matter," which may be a bit less vexing than "culture" to define. Western philosophers since the ancient Greeks have often begun with a prime distinction: the difference between knower and known, which is premised on the notion of soul as a substance apart from the material world. Ideas and the act of knowing are immaterial and therefore superior to the material world of things, the realm of shifting, impermanent appearances. What we have discussed in the concept of habitus and the role of objectification, however, suggests that this dualist split is not the only way to think about materiality. By recognizing the body and its engagement in spaces and things as integrally engaged in the production of experience, we are urged to recast the understanding of matter. Body, mind, and thing are not as discrete as classical philosophy often portrayed them to be.

So what is a thing? What goes into our experience and evaluation of a material object? Certainly its physical properties—its weight, texture, size, shape, and color. But also its relationship to other objects and its placement in the space we ourselves may inhabit next to it, above or below it, or from afar. And there is the object's change over time that is always at work making it what it is. All of these qualities of a thing, even its changing states, bear directly on its physical connection to our bodies. This suggests that a thing is, in part, what it offers us physically—pleasure, pain, or threat of harm. Already we see that a thing is more than a thing, more than itself. A thing is a thing-for-us. But its thingness has only begun to become apparent. We find that a thing's physical characteristics may be rivaled, even eclipsed by the intentions and desires of our fellows who may want it for themselves. Children often argue over a toy as if it answers to their deepest longing, yet the winner may abandon it as soon as she sees her playmates directing their attention to another toy. Things are social.

Adults are hardly different. We want what others want. It is not the thing so much as the social rivalry that infuses the thing with desirability. The presence of a thing, its presentation to consciousness, depends on more than its physicality. Things exist within spaces of value, the cultural marketplace of desire. In addition to desire, use enfolds a thing into a register of value that is what we see or touch when we apprehend a thing. If I have a use for a thing, I am especially aware of it. If I do not require it for some purpose at hand, the thing may fade away on a shelf of stuff or submerge into the oblivion of a drawer of odds-and-ends. Things also exist for human beings within taxonomies, set within schemes of kinship. A hammer is a hammer because its objectness bears a relation to the class of things known as hammers. When we see a hammer, it may be that we see that relation as much as this particular hammer. This is often the case with persons: we see a woman, a man, a black man, a rich man—not individuals, but examples of classes. And we also encounter histories in things. Things come to us with genealogies and biographies such that we see in the thing more than what is there physically—we see evidence of its previous states, of its itinerary, of it trajectory to the present moment. This may change our estimation of the thing, our use for it, our care or disregard for the thing. Finally, we see ourselves and others in things. The letter from a lover is more than mere paper; the photograph of one's parent or child is more than an image; the souvenir from a vacation is more than a bit of clay or wood. Embedded in these things is something that matters to us—our relationship to the person, time, or place from which the object issues.

And yet, in spite of the social or political career of things, there is to consider the life of a thing beyond the human uses for it. The brief consideration of things so far has been clearly slanted toward the network of human consciousness because I have framed the definition of things in terms of their relevance for human beings, especially as related to the human body and human sociality. Most conceptions of "material culture" incline in this direction since whatever such a term may mean, it clearly favors the significance of material things as culture or shaped by human beings. But it is important to bear in mind that this anthropocentric approach need not be in force. One might frame the study of things in terms of non-human materiality, that is, as the editors of *Handbook of Material Culture* summarized one major theme in the study of materiality, "Things as materially existing and having a significance in the world independent of any human action or intervention" (Tilley *et al.* 2006: 4). Although thingness is a concept, a product of human ideation, it remains baldly true that things were here long before human beings arrived.

But framed within the study of religion, the study of things assumes they are an important and almost infinitely varied means by which human beings feel their way into their worlds, feel themselves, feel the past,

anticipate the future, feel together. Yet we must distinguish two dimensions to this framework. There is the politics of things, their inflection within social fields, and there is the poetics of things, that is, their capacity to act upon us, to assert agency, to make rather than only to be made. Several chapters in this book consider the power that images and objects exert in human life. It is important not to collapse the poetics of things into the politics if we are to be able to discern both their materiality and human corporeality.

Is there a way to conduct a balanced or integrated investigation? Anthropologist Webb Keane raises the possibility when he alerts us to the need to avoid isolating cultural representations:

> Even the most transcendental images occur in particular social and ontological spaces, facing audiences, making use of performers and their skills, presupposing certain assumptions about how actions occur and what sorts of beings inhabit the world, and requiring economic and social resources. (1997: 11)

Seeking an integrated account may begin with recognizing the degree to which things are the scaffolding by which the body extends itself, the avenues by which the mind travels as a physical structure in time and space. Things are the medium of various forms of social exchange that structure human relations, create and maintain systems of value. Things may operate as mere tokens in exchange, as with coins, or, as Annette Weiner argued in an important essay, they may bear far greater "symbolic density" by being kept out of exchange, held in the possession of individuals, families, clans, institutions, peoples, or nations—such as rare coins collected and left to family members (Weiner 1994). Some things perform as the passive instruments of a putatively autonomous human consciousness (think of disposable pens, lawn tools, admission tickets, empty soda bottles); others possess individual stories and are part of a genealogy prized by those who admire them (such as religious relics, works of art, antiques, or heirlooms). The former facilitate the operation of daily life; the latter expand and enable thought, feeling, and sensation. In both cases, however differently, objects act on us. Instrumental objects enable humans to imagine and practice agency; objects of intrinsic value enable people to imagine their relation to those people, institutions, histories, or gods whom they experience as sacred. By exerting themselves, people build the world about them, acting on objects, which in turn offer them a world in which to live. Objectification is the process of human activity returning to itself from the world around it, or rather, allowing people to be subjects that apprehend an ordered, valued world of their making. The dialectical process is the self-making of human consciousness, the work of culture.[15] Things both show and tell human beings who they are, or who they want to be. I say "show" *and*

"tell" because people rely on things both as information (the language or coded operation of things) and as agents. There is not a deep ontological split between the universe and human beings. And this point enables us to venture an attempt at defining material culture.

Material culture consists of the things, the practices of using things, and the forms directing their uses on which we build and maintain the worlds about us, and thereby encounter and value ourselves and others. The three dimensions of material culture are things, uses, and paradigms. Material culture is not just objects, not just architectural foundations or jewelry or paintings because, as we saw above, things are more than things. Their edges fade into the systems of value we rely on to recognize and deploy them. Their boundaries fade as they are deployed in practices, merging into bodies and spaces in the medium of feeling. Things are present or absent according to the purposes and needs that drive our activities. But things are also recalcitrant, resistant forces that challenge the schemata or paradigms of culture, the expectations or dispositions that shape human perception. Materiality is also the push-back of physical regimes that culture must grapple within in its world-making activity. Things are powerful, compelling, living agents that touch us, scare us, calm us, protect us. Moving throughout our engagement with them is a complex array of embodied assumptions, which stitch together the patchwork fabric of order into worlds, which are the stage on which a social actor, a person, a human being takes her place.

With that said, what may we offer as a working definition of the material culture of religion? In short, religious material culture consists of the objects, spaces, practices, and ideas in which belief takes shape. Belief, as argued in the Introduction, is not merely discursive assent to a proposition or teaching, but the entire body of human activities that makes a force, an event, or a place sacred. Belief is manifest as an oriented consciousness, but it is also the means of orientation, that is, belief is to be found subtly rooted in what orients people to act as they do. Belief takes the shape of bodies, individual and social, contributing to and drawing from the formative reservoir of habits. Considered as an emergent or temporal phenomenon, belief begins to happen long before an individual may ever affirm a creed. Discerning the life of belief as the stories of things, of bodies, of spaces, and of practices is therefore the business of the scholar of religious material culture.

Notes

1 Hume (2007). Hume traced the rise of religion from its inception in polytheism, arguing for an upward tendency "from the statue or material image to the invisible power; and from the invisible power to an infinitely perfect deity, the creator and sovereign of the universe" (ibid.: 59).

2 Damasio (1999: 41). For consideration of the cognitive function of emotion in religion, see Thagard (2006: 237–49).
3 Damasio (1999: 55). Hume opened his study of the passions with the same claim (Hume 2007: 3).
4 For a biological study of the human face and communication, see Lundqvist and Öhman (2005).
5 See for instance Corrigan (2002: 82–103); Morgan (2007: 165–95; 2009); and Meyer (2006).
6 Two of the most original and influential studies on the felt connections between things and people are Freedberg (1989) and Gell (1998).
7 A pioneering essay in the study of the cultural literacy of the body is Mauss (1973).
8 Turner (1988: 81). Turner explicitly included Goffman in the passage quoted; see also Schieffelin (1998: 194).
9 Influenced by the tradition of Van Gennep and Turner, the ritual theorist Ronald Grimes has criticized Eliade and Jonathan Smith for the disproportionate stress on space in the study of ritual (Grimes 2006: 101–13).
10 Bourdieu ([1972] 1977: 89). For more recent considerations of Bourdieu's concept of practice and habitus as it relates to ritual and the body, see Schieffelin (1998: 199–200); Crossley (2001: 91–119); and Miller (1987: 103–06).
11 See Davis (1997), who carried into art historical investigation the biographical approach to objects set out by Kopytoff (1986).
12 Morgan (1998: 31). For a sustained argument for returning physicality and emotion to the experience of art and the study of aesthetics, see Dissanayake (1992: 24–32).
13 Pinney (2004: 193). For a collection of essays that takes up Alfred Gell's argument that "In so far as there can be an anthropological theory of 'aesthetics', such a theory would try to explain why social agents, in particular settings, produced the responses they do to particular works of art" (Gell 1998: 4), see Pinney and Thomas (2001).
14 Meyer (2006: 19). For an insightful discussion of the task of aesthetics for the study of religious mediation, see Meyer and Verrips (2008).
15 For a classical discussion of objectification (or objectivation) in the social constructivist tradition see Berger (1967: 3–29); for the application of the idea to material culture, see Miller (1987), Myers (2001: 20–21), and Tilley (2006).