

CHAPTER 1

The Persistence, Ubiquity, and Dynamicity of Materiality

Studying Religion and Materiality Comparatively

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1.1 The Persistence of Materiality

On 26 February 2001, the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan under the leadership of the Taliban issued an edict regarding the destruction of religious images. It noted the presence of multiple ‘statues and non-Islamic shrines located in different parts’ of the emirate. ‘These statues have been and remain shrines of unbelievers and these unbelievers continue to worship and respect them. God Almighty is the only real shrine [*taghit*] and all fake idols should be destroyed.’ Thus, the edict concluded: ‘as ordered by the *ulema* [the council of religious and legal scholars] and the Supreme Court of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan all the statues must be destroyed so that no one can worship or respect them in the future’. Arguably, the most high-profile and controversial enactment of the edict was the destruction of the Bamiyan Buddhas. Standing at over 150 ft tall at the foot of the Hindu Kush in the central highlands of Afghanistan, the statues were not only amongst the world’s largest figures of the Buddha, but also material evidence of the widespread circulation of Buddhism along the Silk Road, a transcontinental network that connected the Mediterranean with India and China. Built in the fifth century CE in the Greco-Indian Gandhara style developed by the descendants of Greek artists who came to the region with Alexander the Great, the statues also underscored the key role of materiality in the encounter and cross-fertilization of cultures and religions along the Silk Road. A Taliban spokesperson characterized the efforts to demolish the Bamiyan figures in military terms, almost suggesting that the statues actively resisted the attempts: ‘Our soldiers are working hard; they are using all available arms against the Buddhas.’ After 20 days of trying through various means to weaken the structures, including the use dynamite, anti-aircraft guns, and tank shells,

the figures were finally destroyed, along with many smaller statues of Buddha housed at the National Museum in Kabul.

The demolition of the Buddhas brought widespread condemnation, not only from the West but from neighbouring Muslim countries, as well as those with large Buddhist and Hindu populations. The United Nations' General Assembly was 'appalled' by the Taliban's edict and actions and adopted a resolution stating that 'the artifacts being destroyed in Afghanistan, including the Buddhist statues in Bamiyan, belonged to the common heritage of humankind. Their destruction was an act of intolerance that struck at the very basis of civilized coexistence and was contrary to the real spirit of Islam'. The resolution also 'strongly called upon the Taliban to protect Afghanistan's cultural heritage from all acts of vandalism, damage and theft. It also called upon Member States to help safeguard the unique Buddhist sculptures in Bamiyan, using appropriate technical measures, including, if necessary, their temporary relocation or removal from public view'.¹

We start the volume with this case not to stress the radical iconoclasm of the Taliban, a strategy that, notwithstanding the UN's General Assembly's assertion that the destruction of the Buddhas 'was contrary to the real spirit of Islam', can easily be co-opted by a 'clash of civilization' geopolitical gaze to portray Islam as not coeval with us, as a barbarian, uncivilized, and intolerant religion driven by a pre-modern traditionalism contrary to modern notions of human rights and universal cultural values. To begin with, the Bamiyan Buddhas and surrounding Buddhist monasteries were attacked before the arrival of Islam by Hephthalites (also known as White Huns), for example, who worshipped Hindu gods, such as Vishnu and Shiva, and Zun, a merging of a local mountain deity and classical Shaivism (Wink 1990, pp. 117–119). Moreover, the giant Buddhas had co-existed with Islam for centuries, surviving the Mongol, Mughal, and British empires and the Soviet intervention. While there is indeed a proscription in the Qur'an against *shirk* (the elevation of anyone and anything to Allah's singular preeminent place), Jamal Elias (nd, 14) notes 'that there is no clear islamic [sic] condemnation paralleling the Biblical ban in the second commandment. Qur'anic condemnations are nowhere as explicit, perhaps the clearest being "And Abraham said to his father Azar: Do you take idols (*aṣṇāman*) as gods? Indeed I see you and your people in manifest error"' (6:74).² Finbarr Flood (2002, p. 652), furthermore, shows that historically Islam is not characterized by 'a timeless theology of images'. He points to the waxing and waning of iconoclastic 'moments' within Islam in response to socio-political and cultural complexities, a similar dynamic that one can find in other religions, like Christianity during the Byzantine era, the conquest of the Americas, and the Protestant Reformation (see Kolrud and Prusac 2014).

Flood's and Elias's points dovetail with Webb Keane's observation that with its mistrust of institutional and ritual mediation and its emphasis on *sola fides* and *sola scriptura*, the Protestant Reformation reinforced an iconoclastic 'entextualization of world' (2007, p. 68), as part of a 'creed paradigm' that made the voluntary declaration of faith by the autonomous religious subject the core of authentic religion. 'In the pre-Reformation era, collective recitation of a creed was often linked to the penitential system that reformers rejected. The reformers instead stressed the sincerity and privacy of the creed. Religious materializations such as rituals, offerings, priesthoods, sacred

sites, relics, communities, holy books, and bodily disciplines persisted but usually in a position subordinate to that of statements of belief' (p. 75). James Simpson (2010) goes further, arguing that in its professed aim of breaking radically with tradition, of shattering the prejudices and idols that kept humanity from exercising autonomy on the basis of rationality, Western modernity was driven from the outset by a strong iconoclastic impetus. More specifically, the Kantian separation of pure reason (science), practical reason (ethics), and aesthetics (art) into autonomous spheres, each operating with its own 'transcendental' principles, a separation at the heart of the Enlightenment and Western secular modernity, had profoundly de-materializing effects. For 'transcendental' here meant not just principles not derived from revelation (religion), but also that these principles are a priori conditions of human experience, conditions not affected by the contingencies and particularities of embodied existence.

...substantial aspects of the Enlightenment project aimed to protect art from the sensory excesses of material religion, to protect especially *fine* arts from the day-to-day sensory and material muckiness of religious art and artifact, to abstract and elevate this protected and purified category of object in such a way to disavow human kinships with the substance of that messiness and neutralize its threat. (Promey 2014, p. 2, emphasis in the original)

We shall have more to say about the sources of what is, at the very least, a profound ambivalence towards materiality in Western modernity and in the discipline of religious studies, which is, after all, a modern regime of knowledge. But notice here that iconoclasm cannot be unproblematically attributed to the barbarism of the pre-modern religious Other. '[I]conoclasm is not "somewhere else." Instead, it lies buried deep within Western modernity, and especially deep with the Anglo-American tradition. This tradition insistently and violently repudiates idols and images as dangerous carriers of the old regime' (Simpson 2010, pp. 11–12). Thus, we see how French revolutionaries spurred by the universal ideals of fraternity, equality, and solidarity set out not only decapitate the leaders of the *ancien régime*, but also its icons (Gamboni 1977). Comparisons of this sort demonstrate that when it comes to materiality, it is much too simplistic to oppose irrational, iconoclastic tribal religion to a rational, tolerant, and cosmopolitan modernity. While answers may differ widely, from various forms of iconoclasm to the celebration of the 'threatening, yet glorious' 'power of the material as material' (Bynum 2011, pp. 121–122), the question of materiality is an enduring and vital one across religions and cultures.

Flood argues that at the local level, there has been a far more nuanced management of religious materiality in Islam. The physical obliteration of religious images has been rare. Far more common has been 're-purposing' of images in prescribed ways through defacement, decapitation, mutilation, and substitution with 'safe' depictions such as those of gardens and trees. Thus, to the extent that local and historical resources allow any generalization, 'iconoclastic practice in the medieval Islamic world... was less an attempt to negate the image than to neutralize it' (Flood 2002, p. 647). Furthermore, the "'deanimating" [of] existing images by depriving them of a soul (*ruh*)' (p. 648) involved an implicit recognition of their potential efficacy. This reading certainly makes sense of the Taliban's spokesperson alluding to the Bamiyan figures as resisting their

military efforts to destroy them. The figures themselves had agency, evincing an obduracy that affected the Taliban's actions. This reading also explains all the rich materialities that accompany Islam, from architecture and calligraphy, to textiles, particular styles of dress (see the chapters by **Banu Gökariksel and Anna Secor**, and **Victoria Rovine**) and the embodied practices, landscapes, and infrastructure involved in the Hajj – the donning of the ihram garments, the prayers at the massive encampment at Mina, the stoning of the devil at the three Jamarat walls, the circumambulation and kissing of the Ka'aba. The dynamic assemblage of these materialities and activities is key to the practitioner's experience of Islam as an efficacious religion.

If the challenge is not the outright denial of matter but rather the contested (im)proper deployment and management of what various materials afford us, we can also understand Michael Sells's point that the Taliban themselves depend on particular forms of materiality. For Sells, these include religious and financial networks that have made possible the transnational spread of rectificationist versions of Islam, such as Wahhabism. They also include the global media through which the Taliban made a spectacle of their act of iconoclasm. If they are going to claim authority as the defenders of the purity of Islam, this act must be disseminated globally to members and non-members of the *ummah*. This is why Sells concludes that the Taliban are not a pre-modern or anti-modern form of traditionalism. Quite the contrary, they are the product of a late modern, or perhaps postmodern, globalization, driven electronic media.³

Positing that what is at stake is the power of and over materiality also foregrounds the contradictions in the United Nations' response to the Taliban's edict and actions regarding the destruction of images. Flood rightly takes to task the 'contemporary iconolatry' (2002, p. 651) that undergirds this response, an iconolatry that is paradoxically iconoclastic in the sense that it expunges the religious valence of the Buddha figures and elevates them as the animated material expression of the *Geist* of a particular people or even of the entire humanity. This is an operation of disenchantment and re-enchantment that bears striking similarities with the re-purposing of icons in Islam and of Catholic images and relics by Protestants in art museums. The Buddha figures become so special, thus so 'sacred', to draw from Ann Taves's definition of what counts as religious, that they have to be protected by a special international organization or 'relocated' – even if temporarily – to a museum in the metropole. Here, the UN's contemporary iconolatry must contend with the legacies of colonialism and Orientalism, which as **Sylvester Johnson** shows in his chapter in the *Companion* functioned through a simultaneous denial of embodiment of the colonizer (making himself a universal sovereign subject) and an intense interest in the utter materiality of the colonized. In the Orientalist gaze, the colonized is so primitive, so immature, so tied to her body and her immediate environment that she cannot legislate herself through universal values disclosed by Reason. She must be civilized; but to train her body, we must extract truth for it, summon texts, codes, and artefacts that enable the colonizer to elucidate her essence. To be sure the colonial process of subjection and subjectivation was not a one-way, top-down process. David Chidester speaks of a 'triple mediation' in the production of imperial knowledge. This mediation brought together 'metropolitan theorists' like Max Müller and James Frazer, who 'deployed a comparative method that inferred characteristic of the "primitive" ancestors of humanity from reports about contemporary

“savages” living on the colonized peripheries’, with ‘European observers, primarily travelers, missionaries, and colonial agents’ who mastered local language and provided accounts of indigenous life, and ‘local experts’, who served as ‘nameless translators, or converts at remote mission stations’ (Chidester 2004, p. 72). Nevertheless, these complex mediations were undergirded by one-sided power asymmetries and by relations of exploitation disguised by the benevolent paternalism of the *mission civilisatrice*. The Taliban challenged this hypocritical paternalism when they pointed to the fact the West (in this case the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York) offered money to purchase and relocate the statues of the Buddha but not to feed the starving children of Afghanistan.

Throughout all the twists and turns of this case, what remains constant is the *pervasiveness of materiality*. And we have not even discussed the avowed anti-materialism of Buddhism. Isn’t the essence of Buddhism to seek release from *samsara*, the cycle of life and death, from the impermanence and illusory existence of materiality, including our own bodies? What are we to make of the colossal statues of the Buddha, the sheer size and physicality of which were marks of the success and prestige of Buddhism in the region? As John Kieschnick (2003, p. 4) observes, ‘Buddhist teachings are suffused with a suspicion of sensual pleasure and a tendency to denigrate and renounce the material world’. Nevertheless, Kieschnick warns, ‘there is a danger of giving too much weight to the role of ideas in the formation and development of material culture. Many things are employed according to traditions of religious behavior rather than as outgrowths of well-defined doctrinal precepts’ (p. 14). Indeed, ‘if...we leave the world of recondite doctrine and statements of principle and look instead at the way Buddhism has been practiced, we find material goods everywhere’ (p. 5). Pointing to the ubiquity of stupas containing relics of Bodhisattvas, numinous statues of the Buddha, and Buddhist rosaries and sacred texts carried by merchants and monks in their travels, as well as the networks of economic and political patronage that enabled the growth of the *sangha*, the formation of canons and schools, and the establishment of monasteries, Kieschnick demonstrates that ‘[c]ertain objects could be harnessed for the greater cause of the rejection of the material world, but to do so required meticulous attention to detail and adherence to codes of behavior in their manufacture and use’ (pp. 5–6). No wonder, then, the painstaking regulations regarding monastic life, down to ‘the cut and hem of the monk’s robes, the material from which his alms bowl was to be made, and the length of his walking staff’ (p. 5).

Given the stubborn presence of materiality, whence comes the entrenched representation of Buddhism as an other-worldly philosophy? Gregory Schopen (1997) has shown how early European scholars of Indian Buddhism, imposing misreadings of Darwinian evolution and their Christian assumptions that a legitimate religion must have established universal doctrines and sacred texts, disregarded material culture – bones, stones, coins, statues, inscriptions, caves, and footprints – in the study of how Buddhism was practised in daily life in various local contexts. For example, every time scholars of Buddhism ‘encountered evidence that even suggested that monks and nuns owned personal property, they first signaled their surprise...and then immediately invoked either explicitly and implicitly the rules in the canonical monastic code against it, to assert in one way or another, that they were not really seeing what they saw. Either

that, or they neutralized what they were seeing by attributing to it a “late change” or implied “decline” within the tradition’ (Schopen 1997, p. 4). After all, in their crude attachment to materiality, personal property among monks and nuns as well as popular everyday practices and objects of devotion betrayed the lofty life-transcending core teachings of Buddhism, teachings that seemed to be an alternative or even an antidote to modernity’s ‘iron cage’, which included the expansion and deepening of Western capitalist materialism. These Western scholars ‘axiomatically assumed that the textual ideal either was or had been actually in operation, that if it said so in a text it must have been so in reality’ (p. 4). We will have more to say about the hegemony of textualism in religious studies, but in this case, the texts upon which scholars relied to construct the ideal of Buddhist monasticism came rather late in the development of the tradition and ‘may not have been even known to the vast majority of practicing Buddhists – both monks and laity’, let alone ‘fully implemented in actual practice’ (p. 2).

Donald Lopez is even more specific, pointing to Eugène Burnouf, the chair in Sanskrit at the Collège de France and author of *Introduction à l’histoire du Bouddhisme indien* (1844), as the source of ‘our image of the Buddha, of the simple teacher of morality, seated beneath a tree’ (Lopez 2012, p. 87). Whereas a wider consideration of sources shows jostling appropriations of the Buddha as an idol known by many names or as multiple gods, it is this Enlightenment-based, Kantian view of the Buddha as an ethical teacher that ‘has remained largely unchanged in the European imagination, or at least in the scholarly imagination’, informing a Buddhism that ‘became a model against which the various contemporary Buddhisms of Asia were measured and generally found to be lacking, not only by Europeans but eventually by Buddhist elites in Asia as well’ (p. 88).

Thus, what appears *prima facie* to be a simple case of double iconoclasm – the elimination of the icons of an iconoclastic religion by another iconoclastic religion – offers, in fact, a clear example of the persistence and ubiquity of materiality. After all, as Kolrud and Prusac (2014, p. 6) write, ‘Iconoclasm depends on the power of the image, in as much as a neglected image, which is no longer the object of worship or hatred, remains an unlikely target’. One of key goals of the turn towards materiality is developing a richer understanding of the power of images beyond traditional modernist approaches which see it as the result of naïve, erroneous, or pathological human projection. This is certainly how Marx and Freud, building on Hegel, saw them (Vásquez 2016). Whether we understand the power of religious bodies, objects, and landscapes as emerging from their dynamic interaction with various other bits of materiality, as those influenced by Bruno Latour and Actor-Network theorists do, and/or as afforded by the inherent potency of matter, the aim is to take seriously the centrality of matter in the practice of religion, even when (or especially when) that centrality is actively denied.

The doggedness and ‘everywhereness’ of matter has led some prominent voices in the turn towards materiality to make some bold ontological and epistemological claims. As Keane puts it: ‘that religions are material is non-trivial’ (2008, p. 231). For ideas and beliefs ‘are not transmitted telepathically. They must be exteriorized in some way, for example, in words, gestures, objects, or practices, in order to be transmitted from one mind to another’ (p. 230). As such, ‘[m]ateriality is a precondition for the social circulation and temporal persistence of experiences and ideas. This is true, of course, not just

of ideas but of any materialization, including rituals, institutions, altars, icons, offerings, bodily habits, and so forth' (2008). Recognizing the primacy and necessity of materiality, Birgit Meyer states unequivocally that 'the idea of an immaterial religion is a fiction: even a semiotic ideology that denounces religious things and pictures cannot do without material forms' (2012, p. 319).

As contributors to the turn towards materiality, we also affirm the latter's inescapability, and we do so not only by acknowledging the unavoidable materiality of mediation in the production and circulation of meaning, but also by embracing the embodiment of both the religious practitioners and the scholars who study them. This embodiment involves a material being-with, being-amongst, and being-through materiality (Vásquez 2011) that has binding consequences for how we practise religion and how we study it. Nevertheless, we share Bruno Reinhardt's concern with not turning materiality into another totalizing framework and falling into the same trap to which the otherwise fruitful linguistic turn succumbed, becoming a suffocating textualism. According to Reinhardt, anthropologists, and we would add religious scholars, 'have progressively recast materiality as an immersive environment with no outside position' (2016, p. 78). This would make materiality just the inverted image of the overweening idealism behind the most simplistic readings of Derrida's declaration that '*il n'ya pas hors de texte*'. Indeed, if 'all religion is material religion' (Engelke 2011, p. 209), in what sense is the persistence and ubiquity of materiality a non-trivial insight? Or as Reinhardt (2016, p. 78) asks: 'What is not materiality after all?' In answer to these questions, Matthew Engelke (2011) argues that the task is 'understanding what precisely constitutes the *materiality* of material religion, what makes religious materiality either significant or religious, and according to whom'. In other words, we need to explore how what religious practitioners often understand and refer to as transcendent, immaterial, uncanny, supernatural, and the ultimate Other comes to be experienced immanently, rendered materially present for embodied beings like us and, potentially, non-human animals, as **Anna Peterson** challenges us in her chapter. Adapting from Engelke's work among African Christians, we can say that from the point of view of materiality, the fruitful question to investigate comparatively is how various religions negotiate boundaries and tensions between presence and absence, which can often be paradoxically simultaneously present (Engelke 2007, pp. 11–16, see also **Jessica Boon** in this *Companion*).

Given the tensions and paradoxes involved, for us, the turn to materiality is more a mode of problematizing, an open and flexible critical framework for asking (new) questions and recovering certain kinds of data that approaches which have privileged ideas, beliefs, creeds, and texts have excluded. In that sense, the turn to materiality is driven by a 'limit-attitude', to borrow from Foucault (1984, p. 45), a will to think critically and act transgressively at the limits of the field, so as to continue to expand the on-going conversation about religion.⁴ We agree with Reinhardt that 'material religion is... not an empirical field waiting passively for more and more ethnographic coverage', a sort of positivist position that would imply that now that we have finally broken through textualism, we can capture religion in its 'essence and appearance' once and for all. Rather, the non-reductive materialist study of religions is more like a 'field of problematization', a strategic epistemological intervention which generates ever new ways of approaching religion(s) with rigorous-yet-fallible methods that enable its proper contextualizations – the

placing of the religious practitioners and practitioners of religious studies in the multiple cultural and natural contexts from which they have evolved, on which they depend and through which they create their life worlds.⁵ It is a disciplined engagement with religion that foregrounds the multiple ‘conditions of felicity’,⁶ the materials, agents, processes, practices, dispositions, relationalities (including inclusion, exclusion, domination, resistance, forms of disciplining self and other), mobilities, spaces, affordances, and affects that go into making particular religious phenomena legitimate, authoritative, and efficacious. This engagement is also keenly aware of the conditions of felicity of the theories it generates, of the materializing effects of these theories.

1.2 Sources of the Ambivalence Towards Materiality

If materiality is constitutive of religion and life itself, how come it has been so repeatedly denied or ignored, particularly in religious studies? While, the denial of materiality in religious studies has a particular genealogy connected to the discipline’s rise out of Protestant Christian theology and Western colonialism, materiality poses an unavoidable existential paradox. On the one hand, it is the essential ingredient for the self to live, to exercise transcendence, to engage in transformative practice upon him/herself and his/her environment. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty puts it, before the thinking self, which Descartes posited as the irreducible foundation of knowledge, there is the embodied ‘pre-reflective’, ‘tacit’ cogito, the flesh of our bodies touching and being touched by the flesh of the world. This dynamic reversibility of flesh ‘coiling over’ flesh, of flesh summoning flesh, makes possible the emergence of the representations through which we come to think about the experience of our enfleshment. In Merleau-Ponty’s words:

If, reflecting on the essence of subjectivity, I find it bound up with that of the body and that of the world, this is because my existence as subjectivity is one with my existence as body and with the existence of the world and, finally, because the subject which I am, taken concretely is, inseparable from this this body and this world. (2012, p. 408)

If materiality enables selfhood, it also discloses our finitude, the transitory and protean nature of our bodies and the world, making us utterly vulnerable to pain, suffering, loss, and death, just as it affords the possibility of attachment, joy, the experience of abundance, presence, and satisfaction. Different traditions and schools of philosophy have sought to resolve the tension between the possibility of transcendence and the experience of radical immanence that the materiality affords, but a preferred strategy in Western thinking has been to deny or seek to overcome the radical immanence, finitude, and changeability – read corruptibility – of materiality and to affirm transcendence one-sidedly, by detaching the latter from its material conditions of possibility and positing it as a more foundational, essential, and real reality. This has certainly been the case since Plato’s reading of the ultimate meaning of Socrates’s life and death: that all the vicissitudes of his mortal life made sense as part of a search for universal and unchanging forms like Goodness, Beauty, and Justice. The search for detached, foundational transcendence would recur, in Descartes’s cogito, Kant’s a prioris, Hegel’s absolute

knowledge, Husserl's transcendental ego, and so on. It is true that one can be a materialist and still be consumed by the search for unchangeable foundations and totalizing viewpoints, as evinced by physicalism and certain reductive versions of Marxism.⁷ However, these materialisms do not do justice to the creativity, vibrancy, polymorphousness, and complexity of matter. In fact, these materialisms have been part of the problem, re-inscribing static and simplistic dualisms and casting the focus on materiality in a bad light, leading Marx to complain rightly that

the chief defect of all hitherto existing materialism – that of Feuerbach included – is that the thing, reality, sensuousness, is conceived only in the form of the *object or of contemplation*, but not as *sensuous human activity, practice*, not subjectively. Hence, it happened that the *active* side, in contradistinction to materialism, was developed by idealism, but only abstractly, since, of course, idealism does not know real, sensuous activity as such. (Marx 1978, p. 143)

We, thus, need a materialist framework that foregrounds becoming – process, historicity, alterity, tension, entanglement, and relative (in)determinacy – as nature's most salient feature (Connolly 2011).

While the quest for foundations, essences, and totalizing systems has allowed for rewarding expressions of transcendence, it has also set up intractable dualisms – between body and soul, matter and spirit, materialism and idealism, particularity and universality, contingency and necessity, finitude and eternity, humanity and God, nature and culture – that have vitiated Western thought and action, and the discipline of religious studies within it. Materiality (including our bodies), although a condition for the emergence of dualistic thinking itself, has been denigrated as the inferior pair, always to be derived from or explained through terms associated with detached transcendence.

But the disparagement of materiality is not just the result of philosophical attempts to cope with the paradoxes of materiality. Because materiality entails change and contestation – the possibility that a particular thing, body, and landscape may function or be appropriated differently in accordance with the context – it unavoidably raises issues of power. Materiality involves what Keane terms 'bundling': 'the contingent coexistence of an indefinite number of qualities in any object, which always exceeds the purposes of the designer... Bundling gives to material things (including linguistic forms) an inherently and irreducibly open-ended character' (Keane 2008, p. 230). In social fields marked by power relations, the open-endedness of things leads to attempts to stabilize them, to freeze them within self-evident larger configurations and regimes of value, as regulated by rules that are universal and, thus, go without saying. Hence, the construction and maintenance of orthodoxy often goes hand-in-hand with the assertion of a de-materialized and de-historicized transcendence.

Building on Marx's concept of ideology, Pierre Bourdieu (1977, 1991) asserts that religious elites often present their ideas, practices, and the institutions they lead as given for all times and places, as standing above the constraints of nature, society, and history, constraints that would relativize them, opening them to contestation. A key component of 'the *religious labor* carried out by specialized producers and spokespeople' within the religious field, is 'the principle of *ideological alchemy* by which the transfiguration of social

relations into supernatural relations operates and it is therefore inscribed in the nature of things and thereby justified' (Bourdieu 1991, p. 5). Through this ideological alchemy, religious elites also endeavour to show that the ideas, practices, and institutions of their rivals in the social, cultural, economic, and religious arenas are determined by narrow material interests. In other words, materiality necessarily opens up struggles around the legitimate boundary between transcendence and immanence, between presence and absence, between the sacred and profane, between what is ritually efficacious and what is not. No wonder, then, that it is in the interest of religious elites to deny materiality as much as possible, as Protestant missionaries in Africa and Oceania tried to do by presenting a belief and text-based faith against local 'animist' and 'fetishistic' religions. Since denying materiality altogether is not possible – as the denial requires the deployment of other material practices, as we saw in the case of both the Taliban and Buddhists in the Silk Road – the next best thing is to sacralize a particular regime of management of materiality or to purify certain objects, practices, bodies, and landscapes from profane 'accretions' and 'superstitions' in order to forestall struggles (Keane 2008, p. 231). This explains the Vatican's efforts to control local popular devotions and practices throughout the Catholic world. In response, these local devotions invariably flaunt their materiality, the sheer reality and unruly abundance of crying statues, Holy Hosts that turn into blood, the healing power of water and dirt, in order to assert their legitimacy.

To the extent that religious studies uncritically takes for granted the narratives of religious elites, it reproduces the denial of materiality, an operation that also legitimizes the discourses of the discipline by obscuring the material conditions of their production. Materiality is troublesome for all involved; better neutralize its effects!

The close connection of materiality with orthodoxy and heterodoxy, with domination and resistance, goes a long way towards bringing down to earth the denial of materiality in the modern study of religion. Scholars such as Talal Asad (1993), Matthew Engelke (2011), Webb Keane (2007), and Birgit Meyer (2010) trace this denial to the Protestant Reformation's emphasis on *sola scriptura* and *sola fides*, which generated a representational economy characterized by a suspicion of mediation other than the Bible and the voluntary profession of faith by the autonomous and self-transparent subject. In an effort to curb the abuses of Catholicism, the Reformers challenged the efficacy of images, objects, relics, and rituals, any form of materiality which might give the clergy a privileged access to sacred and, thus, legitimize their power as sanctioned mediators. Granting power and agency to these materialities was, at best, superstition at odds with the authority that secular modernity had given to rationality as the arbiter of truth; at worst, it was idolatry, an accusation that would take a particular force during colonialism, in the violent encounter with indigenous practices.

It is not as if phobia towards materiality started out of the blue with the Reformation. There were intense iconoclastic controversies in Byzantine Christianity in the eighth and ninth centuries, partly in response to the spread of Islam, that contributed to the schism with Western Christianity in 1054.⁸ And there is, of course, Catholicism's entanglement with colonialism. The word fetish, after all, comes from *feitoço* (from *feito*, something made by humans [for the purpose of witchcraft] rather than having life and *raison d'être* of its own), which Portuguese explorers used to identify autochthonous beliefs and practices that, in their eyes, misattributed power and agency to materiality,

particularly human artefacts, setting them apart from and making them inferior to legitimate forms of Catholic sacramentality.⁹ This 'denial of coevalness' (Fabian 1983), in turn, legitimized the Portuguese and Spanish colonizers' destruction of 'savage' local traditions and the forcible conversions to the true, civilized religion. Tomoko Masuzawa has shown how the founders of *Religionswissenschaft* inherited and reproduced this prejudice against fetishism. She notes that in the eyes of the discipline's founders, fetishism was associated with 'absolute materiality', representing a form of consciousness even baser than idolatry and totally opposite to true spirituality. She observes: 'Fetish is materiality at its crudest and lowest; it points to no transcendent meaning beyond itself, no abstract, general, universal essence with respect to which it might be construed as a symbol' (2000, p. 248). As such, 'the fetishist is not only mistaken, she denies her own agency. To surrender one's agency to stones, statues, or even written texts is to diminish one's responsibility' (Keane 2007, p. 77), a responsibility that is critical for the voluntary and authentic acceptance of Jesus Christ as one's saviour.

Herein lies the semiotic transmutation promulgated by the Reformation: it unleashed a 'process entextualization', a 'dematerialization of meaning' (Keane 2007, pp. 14, 62) that predicates the authority and authenticity of religion upon the sincere expression of one's inner belief – a confessional form of subjectivation in Foucaultian terms (see Asad 1993) that has a close elective affinity with modern notions of sovereignty and citizenship – through the profession of a creed. According to this new 'semiotic ideology' (Keane 2008, pp. 16–21), in the most evolved and, thus, 'true' religions, this creed is enshrined in the abstract, universal theology of the great sacred texts. We have seen how this textualism has dominated the study of Buddhism and, Richard King (1999a) and Sharada Sugirtharajah (2003) among others have made the same point about how scholars in the metropole such as William Jones and Max Müller constructed a timeless, universal, spiritual, and scripturally-based essence of Hinduism (see **Patrick Olivelle's** chapter on the Dharmaśāstra, which points to the materialities of everyday life even in the texts and laws). Meyer (2010, p. 746) also notes this process of dematerialization in Weber's comparative sociology of religion, which, despite his ambivalence towards the iron cage and disenchantment brought about by modern capitalism, privileges 'content and meaning above form', considering Protestantism's this-worldly asceticism as more transformative than 'magical' forms of religiosity that invest materiality with agency. Critiquing the failure of sociology to offer nuanced, non-reductive readings of the global proliferation of Pentecostalism and other spirit-centric forms of Christianity that see no contradiction between salvation in the beyond and health and wealth in the now, that engage as exorcism of possessing evil spirits (see **Simon Coleman's** piece on spiritual warfare), Meyer rightly complains that 'Max Weber's analysis of Protestantism as a salvation religion that moved beyond reliance on concrete material forms has served as a distorting lens even in the study of Protestantism' (2012, p. 9). Weber

suggests a parallel between the religious devaluation of art and the devaluation of the magical, orgiastic, ecstatic and ritual elements of religiosity in favor of ascetic and spiritual or mystical elements. The higher religion develops, the less it depends on material forms. Obviously this view echoes typically Protestant criticism of Catholicism and, for that matter, 'paganism' as 'idol worship', as being steeped in a magical attitude that falsely attributes a spirit to inanimate matter (p. 10).

In that sense, Robert Orsi is correct in pointing out that religious studies' inability hitherto to place materiality front and centre is deeply connected to theological and political struggles between European Protestants and Catholics over the issue of presence (and absence) of the supernatural in nature, struggles that found their most poignant expression in debates over the Eucharist, over transubstantiation versus consubstantiation and symbolic remembrance.

'Religion' is derived from 'Protestantism'. This is the dominant view among scholars of religion today, but it is only partially accurate... it is historically more accurate – and theoretically and historiographically more generative – to say that 'religion' was the creation of the profound rupture between Catholics and the varieties of Protestantism over the question of presence, of the ongoing and intensifying caricatures of each other's theologies and rites of presence and of their mutual denunciations of practicing what in their respective judgments were not really 'religion'. (Orsi 2016, p. 32)

Orsi further argues that these sectarian struggles, the religious and political identities and borders generated by them, were carried to the colonies, where missionaries and administrators sought to impose them upon their subjects. No wonder, then, that 'the fissure of presence/absence has run through the center of Western culture and through all of the modern world wherever the armies, missionaries, and merchants of Protestant and Catholic empires landed, which is to say almost everywhere' (p. 45).

As compelling as this totalizing reading is, it neglects that struggles over presence and absence, over materiality and immateriality, over transcendence and immanence did not just take place in the 'West.' For example, Indian philosophy and theology contain a variety of perspectives involving 'different kinds of "matter-s" and different meanings attached to them' (Narayanan 2016, p. 345), from the dualism of Samkhya, which sets up a tension between spirit and matter similar to Aristotelian hylomorphism – the notion that Platonic forms and matter are inextricably linked in the process of bringing existence forth – to Shankara's Advaita (non-dualist) Vedanta.¹⁰ Yet, even in Samkhya, *purusha* (pure consciousness) has to interact with *prakriti* (nature) in order to come to know its own essence. Purusha is, in fact, inactive and devoid of all qualities, while prakriti is generative. It is matter as driven by forces ('strands', *gunas*) that gives purusha pure potency, the power to become through periods of equilibrium and disequilibrium. In turn, Shankara's assertion that God is *Brahman*, the eternal, infinite, and ultimate reality of all there is, entails a pantheism that cannot malign materiality without contradiction, even if liberation means achieving the realization that bodies and things are merely transitory and illusory, that, at bottom, Brahman is their unchanging essence. This cosmology, moreover, opens the way for the qualified non-dualism of Ramanuja, who saw the material world as Brahman's body. Ramanuja 'materializes' Advaita Vedanta: the universe is the glorious manifestation of Brahman and Brahman is in all things, yet Brahman exceeds and grounds the universe. Thus, devotion (*bhakti*) to a personal god (Vishnu) through embodied practices, including *puja*, *darshan*, the recitation of the divinity's name or mantras, festivals like Navaratri, and *gatka* performances, and through sacred objects and places, such as *murtis*, *prasad*, rivers, groves, and temples, so widespread in 'lived Hinduism' is not only a valid path to Brahman, but

a font for a higher, more immediate and direct experiential knowledge, beyond the limits of reflective, introspective awareness (see **Jacobsen, Pinkney, Rosen, and Sanford**). And if Shankara is read as an absolute idealist foreshadowing Schelling and Hegel, then, Lokayata (later known as Charvaka) represents the opposite pole of Indian monism: a materialism that denies Vedic supernaturalism, giving primacy to the senses and bodily pleasures. The original sources of this materialism are piecemeal and there is evidence that its proponents were persecuted and primary texts were destroyed by advocates of theism. This may account for Lokayata's marginal status in Indian thought (Bhattacharya 2011; Chattopadhyaya 1959).

It is beyond the purview of this chapter to provide a comprehensive treatment of the question of materiality in Indian philosophy and theology. Such cross-religious and cross-cultural analyses are much needed if we are serious about the turn to materiality being driven by a 'limit-attitude'. And these analyses should not simply remain at the philosophical level, but must also endeavour to study how these various views shape and are shaped by the practices of individuals located in socio-historical and ecological fields of power. To the extent that we can generalize, all orthodox schools of Hindu thought (*astikas*) affirm what I have called the persistence and ubiquity of matter. '[A]lmost all forms of matter point to and even are encompassed in the understanding and experience of the supreme deity or *brahman*, and the affordances of matter... ultimately lie in the path to liberation or *moksha*, variously defined' (Narayanan 2016, p. 331). Debates within and among *astikas* also show that struggles and ambivalences over materiality are not unique to Western thinking, even with its global extension through colonialism and capitalism. Still, to the extent that the discipline of religious studies is a Western construct, Orsi's reading of the centrality of Catholic-Protestant theological conflicts is reflective of our own biases towards matter.

Up until the last couple of decades, the denial/dismissal of materiality had been normative in religious studies. At first sight, Mircea Eliade's history of religions school, which dominated religious studies up until the 1970s, did foreground materiality, always seeking to include as many hierophanies, that is, spatio-temporal and material expressions of the sacred, as possible in its comparative analyses. Eliade referred to 'the paradox' or the 'dialectic of hierophanies', whereby the sacred, which is by definition *sui generis*, universal, and foundational, 'manifest[s] itself in the profane', 'in material things' (1958, p. 29). Thus, while 'a hierophany is always a historical event (that is to say, always occurs in some definite situation)' (p. 3), 'every hierophany shows, makes manifest, the coexistence of contradictory essences, sacred and profane, spirit and matter, eternal and non-eternal, and so on' (p. 29). Placing the paradox of hierophanies at the centre of the history of religion approach would seem to offer a promising way to repair the dualisms that have characterized Western thinking and, more importantly for our intents and purposes, to recognize the vital role that materiality plays in making religious experience possible. However, because Eliade saw religion in essentialist terms, as the irreducible experience of *homo religiosus*, an ahistorical self whose relation to the sacred was shaped by archetypal forms, he took materiality to be simply a medium for the historical manifestation of a deeper, more ontological, and trans-historical reality. Eliade and the history of religions approach were not interested in materiality *qua* materiality, as agentic materials that afford and constrain particular experiences which

come to be deemed as religious, but as the expression an unconditioned *Ganz Andere* (the Wholly Other). In other words, the dominant school of thought in religious studies did not grapple with the full implications of the inescapability of material mediation.

Clifford Geertz's interpretive anthropology, which arose as an alternative to the history of religion from the 1970s until the emergence of postmodernist and postcolonial critiques, went some way towards re-contextualizing and re-historicizing the study of religion, demanding 'thick descriptions' of particular, local religious beliefs and practices, while acknowledging the positionality of the scholar in the process of interpretation (Geertz 1973). Nevertheless, because Geertz understood religion primarily as belief and cognition, as internally coherent and relatively autonomous symbolic systems that provided 'models of and for' making sense of bafflement, suffering, and evil, his approach tended to reproduce some of the Christian, Protestant, notions of what counts as real religion. It is worth quoting Talal Asad's critique in this regard, for arguably, more than any text, it marks the beginning of a turn to materiality, particularly to practice, embodiment, and embeddedness in power relations, in religious studies.

...what appears to anthropologists today to be self-evident, namely that religion is essentially a matter of symbolic meanings linked to ideas of general order.... that it has generic functions/features, that it must not be confused with any of its particular historical and cultural forms, is in fact a view that has a specific Christian history. From being a concrete set of particular rules attached to specific processes of power and knowledge, religion has become abstracted and universalized. (Asad 1993, p. 42)

Not only is Geertz's supposedly-cross-cultural definition of religion conditioned by historical, social, political, and cultural processes, but by setting religion as a separate symbolic system with its own internal logic, it fails to recognize the ways in which religious phenomena are inextricably entwined with material life.

If religious symbols are understood, on the analogy with words, as vehicles for meaning, can such meanings be established independently of the form of life in which they are used? If religious symbols are taken to be as the signatures of a sacred text, can we know what they mean without regard to social disciplines by which their correct reading is secured? If religious symbols are to be thought of the concepts by which experience are organized, can we say much about them without considering how they come to be authorized?

...Religious symbols – whether one thinks of them as communication or cognition, of guiding action or of expression emotion – cannot be understood independently of their historical relations with nonreligious symbols and of their articulations in and of social life, in which work and power are always crucial. (Asad 1993, p. 53)

Building on Asad's genealogical approach, as well as on Edward Said's appropriation of Michel Foucault's notion of regimes of knowledge in his critique of Orientalism, Russell McCutcheon (1997), Tim Fitzgerald (2000), Tomoko Masuzawa (2005), and Jason Josephson (2012) have shown how the construction of the category of religion in general and of particular (world) religions, has been connected with colonial, imperial, nationalist, and capitalist projects and how the discipline of religion has

manufactured its own *sui generis* object and the methods to study it, thereby guaranteeing its institutional autonomy and privileges. These works have undoubtedly deepened the materialist turn. However, their emphasis on deconstructing the discourses of the discipline pose the danger of navel gazing, making the study of religion a critical discourse on the discourses of the discipline and ignoring the rigorous analysis of the variegated phenomena that at a particular time and place are deemed religious (or not), and how materiality is central to this contested process of the construction of religion, not just in academia, but in the public sphere, in everyday life. Such a navel gazing has often been exacerbated by an absolutist appropriation of the linguistic turn among some influential post-structuralists, who have insisted that language is not just a very useful metaphor to understand the dynamics of human activity, but that there is nothing beyond language.¹¹ Paradoxically, this linguistic reductionism has reproduced the same decontextualized symbolicism and textualism that Asad critiqued in Geertz. Archaeologist Bjørnar Olsen speaks of a 'tyranny of the text' to stress

how the textual approach campaigned for by poststructuralists (and others) has reinforced the hegemony of the text, allowing (in a very literal sense) no space outside it. Finally fully conquered, the materiality of things ended up as little more than an arbitrary quality in dematerialized discourse... In the wake of an idealist intellectual tradition that has continuously devalued, stigmatized, and demonized the material (always bypassed, always made transcendental), to conceive of any material experience that is outside of language becomes the subject of suspicion. (Olsen 2013, p. 56)

Does that mean that we should eschew the study of texts and beliefs in religious studies? That would re-introduce another unhelpful dualism – between material religion, which is all about embodiment, practice, and power, and 'immaterial' religion, concerned with texts, beliefs, meanings, and symbols. Instead, it is more productive to consider the materiality of texts, the materials out of which they are made (as **Kevin O'Neill** does for the Truth Commission Reports in Guatemala) and what these materials afford, their contexts of production, circulation, valuation, and use, how they are part of 'textual communities' that deploy these texts in their everyday life (Blackburn 2012), as they 'dwell' and 'cross' (Tweed 2006), as they make boundaries within and without and challenge them. By the same token, we can approach belief materially, focusing on the somatic, social, and ecological vectors, as well as on the 'representational economies'¹² that make it possible and plausible. Tanya Luhmann (2012, pp. 39–71), for example, illuminates how, in a secular society that dismisses the presence of God, American Evangelicals must develop an embodied 'mode of attention' that allows them to discern when God is truly 'talking' to them (rather than the devil or perhaps it is just an uncanny coincidence). This mode of attention is a 'richly layered skill' that has to be developed through training within an interpretive community, through practices like prayer, fasting, and role playing. We shall have more to say about learning bodily to be religious later on.

While the current turn towards materiality recognizes the materiality of language, symbols beliefs, symbols, and texts, it entails a broader, more open-ended effort to

explore the multifarious ‘vibrancy of matter’ (Bennett 2010), dynamics of material unfolding that make representation and semiosis possible in the first place.

1.3 Characterizing the Turn to Materiality

1.3.1 *The Recovery of the Body*

Central to the turn has been an increasing focus on the body. The body, whether it concerns the incarnation, the passion, the resurrection, or nature of the Eucharist, has always been central in Christianity. Theologian Mayra Rivera recognizes the diversity of Christian views about the body. However, she identifies two broad traditions. One emerges from Apostle Paul’s separation between spiritual and carnal bodies, a separation that is ‘as wide as the chasm between heaven and earth’ (Rivera 2015, p. 29). The chasm is determined by sin, which is an inherent condition of the body’s fleshy nature. Or as Paul writes: ‘For we know that the law is spiritual; but I am of flesh, sold into slavery under sin.’ That is why ‘I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. Now if I do what I do not want, I agree that the law is good. But in fact it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me. For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is, in my flesh’ (Rm 7:14–18). Thus, at a very minimum, the Pauline tradition expresses a profound ambivalence about the body and materiality. It is not an outright dualism: spiritual and carnal bodies ‘reach toward each other across a vast ontological distance. The expectation might be that the flesh will become – might be becoming – spirit. But ultimately “the flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God”’ (Rivera 2015, p. 29). This ambivalence will interact with philosophical currents, most prominently with Cartesian thinking, to harden into the spirit-matter dualism that was central for the rise of Western modernity. The gulf between the unconditioned, disembodied, and sovereign mind and the contingent and mechanically determined body (as part and parcel of the material world) guaranteed what Pierre Bourdieu calls the ‘scholastic vision’, which ‘presupposes a single, fixed point of view – and therefore, the adoption of a posture of a motionless spectator installed at a point (of view) – and also the use of a frame that cuts out, encloses and abstracts the spectacle with a rigorous, immobile boundary’ (Bourdieu 1997, pp. 21–22). This scholastic view enabled the rise of modern science, and to the extent that it sees itself as a science distinct from theology as the term *Religionswissenschaft* indicates, of the discipline of religions studies.

Rivera, nevertheless, also identifies a more somatophilic tradition in Christianity anchored in the Gospel of John, which ‘conveys the intertwining of the material and the spiritual – word and flesh, life and light, and so on’ (Rivera 2015, p. 27). In this gospel, ‘Jesus describes his flesh as bread given to be eaten. “The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh.” The prologue describes the confluence of word, life, flesh; here we are invited to contemplate the convergence of flesh, life, bread’ (p. 22). Such a convergence highlights the central role that materiality plays in the divine salvific plan, in a kind of immanent transcendence (God lovingly emptying him/herself into the world and becoming vulnerable), where the various material elements are transubstantiated through their enmeshing.

While Johannine tradition has been consistently submerged by the Pauline narrative, it has irrupted periodically in different forms in the writings and practices of mystics like Meister Eckhart and Teresa of Avila and various forms of pietism, and in liberation, process, feminist and other contextual theologies. The Johannine appreciation for the potency of the flesh in tension with Pauline suspicions of it have also informed the seminal studies of the body in Christianity of scholars such as Caroline Walker Bynum (1987, 1995, 2006), Peter Brown (1981, 1988), and William Christian (1981). In many ways, their works dovetailed nicely with the efforts of phenomenology, from late Husserl through Heidegger to Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, to foreground *Dasein*, the embodied and historical self emplaced in his/her life-world. Indeed, phenomenology broadly understood not in the Eliadean or van der Leeuwian sense as a search for universal patterns or underlying essences, but as a keen concern for the lived experiences of the situated individual, has animated the study of lived religion, particularly the study of Christianity at the popular level, where the body and materiality often play a major role (Csordas 1994; Orsi 2005). **Jessica Boon**'s essay on the incarnate body and blood in Christianity builds upon these seminal works. She argues that in medieval Christian theology, the blood of Jesus was hyper-material, standing for an abundant, fully potent, and living materiality that can offer alternative ways to rethink not only our dualistic and reductive conceptions of the body but of our perception of matter as inert. More about this later.

The foregoing shows that, despite the dematerializing focus on religion as belief, creed, and text, there has always been a concern for the body. However, the body came to occupy centre stage in critical theory and cultural studies following the events of May 1968 in France. Thinkers such as Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze sought to make sense of the rapid mobilization of mass resistance against the power of the capitalist state over not just the economic system, but over all aspects of life, from education to sexuality. By the same token, they felt that it was necessary to theorize how this state, which for a moment seemed to be on the brink of collapsing, was able to reassert domination. What was needed was an analysis of the 'microphysics of power', of the various mechanisms that operate at the crevices and terminal points of sociality through which particular subjects are constituted out of 'docile bodies', out of bodies observed, disciplined, and inscribed by discursive and non-discursive practices (Foucault 1980). The circulation of power at this capillary level explains the pervasiveness, and thus, the resilience of domination, as well as its fragility, since power does not issue from a single, centralized, top-down source, but is produced piecemeal, in the localized encounter of bodies. Marx (1908, p. 396) had already written movingly about how capitalist production 'converts the labourer into a crippled monstrosity, by forcing his detail dexterity at the expense of a world of productive capabilities and instincts ... Not only is the detail work distributed to the different individuals, but the individual himself is made the automatic motor of a fractional operation... making man a mere fragment of his own body'. Foucault extends and deepens 'old' historical materialism by bringing into focus a myriad of struggles and manoeuvres over the body not just issuing from class, or even economic, dynamics.

Since 1968, the body has been embroiled in multiple controversies, including the challenges posed by advances in genetics and biotechnologies, the threat of climate

change, the fear and public performance of terrorism, the use of torture by the state and non-state actors, the construction and control of illegal immigration, human trafficking, the public visibility of religion in secular modernity, struggles over gender identities, racial profiling, and discrimination against disabled people, the global commodification of sports and entertainment, the popularity of reality TV, and the ever presence of social media in daily life. While all these debates have foregrounded the body in different ways, Foucault has continued to serve as a central point of reference. From a materialist point of view, he argued that power did not operate just discursively, through the extraction of truth from bodies and the production of specialized corpuses of knowledge that eventually solidified into the social and medical sciences, but also through the placement of bodies in spaces where they could be isolated, observed, prodded, trained, and managed. The best known example of how Foucault recovered the agency of space, disclosing its capacity to generate particular forms of subjectivity, is of course the 'panopticon'. It is true that produced and productive space had been the subject of geographers like Henri Lefebvre (1991) and Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), as well as of scholars of religion from Durkheim and Eliade and J.Z. Smith (1978, 1987) and Thomas Tweed (1997, 2006). However, Foucault gave a new impetus to the study of spatial dynamics. While some of the authors in the *Companion's* section on 'spatiality, mobility, and relationality' partake the Foucaultian focus on space, domination, and resistance, most notably **Elaine Peña's** analysis of the geo-politics of borderlands religion, these contributions demonstrate the interplay between materiality and religious place-making. In turn, building on Tweed's insight that religion is about dwelling and crossing, **John Eade** discusses how mobility, in this case pilgrimage, is intimately connected with the transformation of landscapes through a 'monumentality' (i.e. 'erect imposing structures around the human and natural environment') that is often a material source for the re-assertion of nationalism and for advancing regional and global projects of evangelization.

Foucault combined his microphysics of power with an 'ascending analysis' in the notions of 'biopower' and 'governmentality'¹³ to examine power from its 'infinitesimal mechanisms, which each have their own history, their own trajectory, their own techniques and tactics, and then see how these mechanisms... have been – and continue to be – invested, colonised, utilised, involuted, transformed, displaced, extended, etc. by ever more general mechanisms and by forms of global domination', such as the state in late capitalism (1980, p. 99). Because biopower targets simultaneously biological and social bodies, with the aim to 'conduct the conduct' ('*conduire les conduits*') of individuals and populations, regulating, for instance, fertility, mortality, and criminality rates as well as indices of health, production, and consumption, these notions have provided new ways to explore the entanglement of embodiment, subjectivity, and political economy.¹⁴ This Foucaultian line of research on the body has been crucial in the development of a robust anthropology of Christianity, arguably best exemplified by the works of Ruth Marshall (2009) and Kevin O'Neill (2009) which focus on the production of Christian citizenship by pneumatic transnational forms of Christianity that advocate a gospel of health and wealth and engage in spiritual warfare. O'Neill, for example, shows how in post-civil war Guatemala embodied practices such as speaking in tongues, power prayers, fasting, exorcism of demonic spirits, and public confessions of one's sinfulness

saddle Pentecostals with a 'weighty responsibility' that 'promotes self-governing subject – citizens whom governments do not have to rule because these men and women manage themselves' (2009, pp. 5, 15). In light of the generalized climate of insecurity following the peace accords and the social dislocation produced by the imposition of a neoliberal economic project (and the accompanying downsizing of the welfare state), this incorporated self-government has significant implications for Guatemalan civil society. While his piece in the *Companion* does not explicitly address the body – focusing more on the material production of truth and memory in post-civil war Guatemala – O'Neill's essay and those in the section entitled 'Economies and Governmentalities of Religion', address the ways in which religion and materiality are implicated in political and economic logics.

Within a broad post-structuralist tradition, Foucault's analytics of the body could be read as a genealogical study in Western modernity of what Marcel Mauss called 'techniques du corps', 'the ways in which... men [*sic*] know how to use their bodies' (1973, p. 70), regimes of practices that cultivate and inculcate specific embodied skills, producing, for example, expert swimmers, pianists, and dancers, as well as subjects who recognize and enact proper ways of eating, walking, talking, sitting, praying, meditating, performing exorcism, enacting sacred rituals, or experiencing God 'as if he were real in the flesh and standing by your side, with love' (Luhmann 2012, p. 38). Mauss's pioneering work also inspired Bourdieu's concept of habitus, which places the body front and centre as the mediator between individual and society, production and reproduction, and between agency and structure. Bourdieu defines the habitus as 'embodied history, internalized as a second nature and so forgotten as history' (1980, p. 56). More specifically, one's habitus is an incorporated system of dispositions, propensities, and tastes that make possible 'regulated improvisation', that is, the production practices that are in sync with the dynamic context in which one is embedded. In other words, the habitus is what gives a successful player an intuitive 'feel for the game', a visceral practical sense of what is possible and what is not that is not exhausted by the conscious knowledge of the game's rules. Thus, the habitus is doubly corporeal: it is generated by the bodily internalization of the materiality of the one's life-world and, simultaneously, it is generative of this material life-world through embodied action, i.e. through its externalization. The habitus is 'a socialized body, a structured body, a body which has incorporated the immanent structures of a world or of a particular sector of the world – a field – and which structures the perception of that world as well as action in that world' (Bourdieu 1998, p. 81). The habitus's double corporality enables us to overcome some of the dualities that have dominated Western thinking, between

determinism and freedom, conditioning and creativity, consciousness and the unconscious, or the individual and society. Because the habitus is an infinite capacity for generating products – thoughts, perceptions, expressions, and actions – whose limits are set by the historically and socially situated conditions of its production, the conditioned and conditional freedom it provides is as remote from creation of unpredictable novelty as it is from simple mechanical reproduction of the original conditioning. (Bourdieu 1980, p. 55)

This 'constructionist' strand of thinking about the body – the body as artefact, as a 'memory pad' inscribed with a *hexis*, a way of bearing oneself that is as 'durable as the indelible inscriptions of tattooing' (Bourdieu 1997, p. 141), has proven extremely fertile in the study of the construction of binding-yet-contested gendered, racial, colonial, and religious/pious identities. It has shown that belief 'is not a "state of mind", still less a kind of arbitrary adherence to a set of instituted dogmas or doctrines... but rather a "state of the body"' (p. 68). This insight has informed not only Asad's critique of Geertz's symbolism, but also Saba Mahmood's study of the 'cultivation of the ideal of virtuous self' through embodied rituals of piety among Muslim women. For these women, 'bodily acts – like wearing the veil or conducting oneself modestly in interactions with people (especially men) – do not serve as manipulable masks in a game of public presentation, detachable from an essential interiorized self. Rather they are the *critical markers*, as well as the *ineluctable means* by which one trains oneself to be pious. Thus while wearing the veil at first serves as a means to tutor oneself in the attribute of shyness, it is also simultaneously integral to the practice of shyness' (Mahmood 2001, p. 214). Mahmood's work is not just a compelling illustration of the tight relationship of embodiment and religious subjectivity; it is also a critique of essentialist notions of agency in Western modernity, one that 'parochializes the normative subject of feminist theory as desirous of freedom from relations of domination' and introduces alternative forms of self-making (p. 203).

By challenging the taken-for-granted notion that the body is a given, an unchanging (and thus not in need of critical scrutiny) nature that grounds the self, constructionist approaches have underscored the body as a shifting arena in struggles around individual and collective identities. **Gwynn Kessler's** piece on the Rabbinic constructions of gender illustrates the pay offs of approaching the body in non-essentialist ways. As she examines how the tradition deals with physical bodies and physiological processes, she demonstrates how the sources grapple with somatic malleability and fluidity, constructing gender more as a matter of 'doing' than of 'being'. Here, Kessler builds creatively on Judith Butler's influential understanding of gender as performative, as the relatively stabilized effect of the repeated performance of acts. In Butler's words, '[g]ender is the repeated stylization of the body, a set of repeated acts within a highly rigid regulatory frame that congeal over time to produce the appearance of substance, of a natural sort of being' (1990, p. 25). The implication is that what we take unproblematically to be the natural body, upon which we come to impose a multiplicity of disciplines in order to produce particular identities is, in fact, already the unrecognized outcome of performances within power-laden social and cultural fields. Moreover, the assertion of the 'naturalness' of the body is a way to reify and render normative the outcomes of particular performances. In that sense, Butler goes beyond Foucault and Mauss, who assumed that there is a (raw) body anterior to discourse and practice.

Constructionist approaches to the body stand in tension with an emerging research programme that focuses on the neuro-cognitive dimensions of embodiment. This programme posits that the body is not just as an endlessly malleable socio-cultural construct but, above all, a biological entity that is the product of a long process of natural evolution, an entity endowed with fairly stable structures of cognition and experience, including a capacity for religious experiences that are cross-culturally patterned and

recurrent. Researchers within this programme have broadly concentrated on two areas: (i) seeking to demonstrate the ‘naturalness’ of religion, that is, how it is the by-product of the ways in which the mind has evolved to ensure the humanity’s adaptation and survival and, consequently, how religion is acquired and transmitted across times and spaces (see for example Barrett 2004; Boyer 1994, 2001; Dennett 2006; Guthrie 1993); (ii) studying the neurophysiology of religious experience, identifying the neural correlatives, i.e. how the brain and, to a lesser extent, the sensorimotor system affords and is transformed by religious phenomena (see for example D’Aquili and Newberg 1999; Newberg 2010). These two research foci have certainly materialized the study of religion further, rightly challenging the knee-jerk anti-essentialism of constructionist perspectives and contributing to a more holistic understanding of embodiment that includes neuro-cognitive and ecological processes. Nevertheless, as **Nathaniel Barrett** writes in his chapter entitled ‘Cognitive Science, Embodiment, and Materiality’, this research has tended to fall into the traps of mentalism (continuing to equate religious experience with mental operations, such as the imputation of human agency to natural phenomena, as in the classical definition of animism), functionalism (viewing religious states as defined only by how they function in relation to other states regardless of the physical structures of the body), and/or reductionism (seeing religion as the neuro-chemical activity of certain parts of the brain).

Accounting for all the richness of religious experience requires what Barrett terms non-reductive “‘radical” kinds of embodied cognitive science (such as dynamical systems theory, ecological psychology, and enactive theory)’, which are ‘primarily concerned with the context-sensitive, dynamic emergence (or “soft assembly”) of cognitive processes over the course of development and in the midst of situated activity’. For a radically embodied cognitive science of religion, it is not a matter of opposing fixed biological constraints to open-ended cultural production, as if nature and culture were two separate realms that need to be unified by taking one side of the duality. It is not an irresolvable contest between ‘epistemological relativists’ and ‘power polemicists’ (Cohen et al., 2008), on the one hand, and, on the other, reductive physicalists. Rather, since ‘cognitive processes emerge from the non-linear and circular causality of continuous sensorimotor interactions involving brain, body, and environment’ (Thompson 2007, p. 11), it is a matter of departing from ‘naturalcultural contact zones’ (Haraway 2008), from relations of reciprocal influencing among multiple forms of materialities, among interpenetrating neural, social, technological, and ecological networks from which our lived bodily experiences emerge and are sustained. Another way of putting it from a non-reductive materialist perspective: the focus should fall on the mutually transformative interplay amongst systems – embodied brain and the embrained body, society, and the natural environment – all characterized by differential degrees of plasticity (Malabou 2008).¹⁵

In this regard, some of the most promising research bridging constructionism and radically embodied cognitive science fall under what we may call ‘aesthetics of religion’, aesthetics understood as not in a disembodied, disinterested Kantian fashion, but going back to the ‘Greek term *aisthesis*: an epistemological concept that denoted *sensory perception*, but also referred to the larger process of how human beings make sense of their environment and of themselves through their senses’ (Grieser and

Johnston 2017). Religion is not simply about concepts of gods and beliefs in spirits, as conventional cognitive science of religion tends to assume, but it often departs from an elemental viscerality, a 'feltness of the supernatural' (Cassaniti and Luhrmann 2011, p. 44) that is inextricably connected with senses.¹⁶ Religion is more than often a multi-sensorial event that involves not just sights, but also intense sounds, smells, taste and tactile experiences. As such, phenomenologies of religion must move beyond ocular-centrism, the hegemony of vision in Western thinking (Levine 1993). As we saw with the 'scholastic vision', this privileging has contributed to disembodiment because it has construed visuality as the activity of an-all-seeing spectator removed from the flow of history. But as the activity not of a disembodied eye, but of eyes that are part and parcel of whole bodies, of interactive perceptual systems, '[v]isuality is itself... a multisensory phenomenon'. 'In embodied perception, as distinguished from the products if not the practice of scholarly writing, one sense cannot be effectively isolated from others. The senses are deeply intertwined, furthermore, not only among themselves but also with feeling, emotion, and affect as well as cognition' (Promey 2014, pp. 3, 11).¹⁷ These observations certainly resonate with **Brent Plate's** assertion in his chapter on cinema that 'watching a film is a sensual experience done by actual bodies in actual space, and often with other bodies in a proximate space, an activity that becomes religious in its form... [t]he material effects of cinema linger on long after the show is over, and people religiously reproduce the world of the film in other aspects of their lives. *Cinema is a material media practice* that is constantly embodied and re-embodied in and through bodies, time, and space'. **Heidi Campbell** and **Louise Connelly** also demonstrate how religion on-line, a medium that the early literature on cyberspace extolled as providing a view from everywhere and nowhere, not only relies on materials networks and devices, but also involves the mixing of virtual and physical ritual practices, objects, and spaces. They also point to the need to develop an aesthetics of digital religion, 'a mapping of visual sensorial engagement of digital artifacts in human-computer interactions'. For example, we need to investigate how immersive digital environments and the mobile devices that we carry everywhere will shape our senses and neuro-motor system.

Rosalind Hackett's piece on 'Aural Media' contributes in the direction of a rounder approach to the full human sensorium in religious studies, demonstrating how 'sound and hearing constitute one of the optimal entry points for exploring materiality and immateriality in relation to religion'. In the same fashion, the chapters in the section on food and commensality, a thriving subfield in religious studies, show how religion is about the contact with and ingestion of foods and objects that are imbued with sacred power or auspiciousness, as is the case of *prasāda* (see **Andrea Pinkney's** chapter), or potentially polluting and charged negative karmic residues that have materializing effects in the cycle of birth and rebirth, as in the case of meat (see **Steven Rosen** on Vaishnava Vegetarianism). We shall have more to say about the relational potency of things vis-à-vis the embodied self later on. Pinkney's and Rosen's chapters also demonstrate Vasudha Narayanan's assertion that even when the goal is liberation from the materializing effects of karma, considerable physical devotional labour and an array of objects, landscapes, and tightly regulated material procedures are involved in bringing about the 'dematerialization' of the material.

By asking 'how in the context of religious practice are the senses stimulated, governed and disciplined? How are religious experiences, emotions and attitudes created, memorised and normalised? How do religious perceptual orders interact with those of a larger culture?' (Grieser and Johnston 2017), the aesthetics of religion approach dovetails nicely with constructivist concepts like *habitus*, techniques of the body, and bio-power, without ignoring the neuro-physiology of the human sensorium. We can examine, for example, the acquisition of proprioceptive memories and other body schemas by Santería initiates as their mirror neurons are culturally coded watching and dancing with their *padrinos* as they receive the *orichas* with the correct etiquette.¹⁸

Aesthetics of religion also considers how the senses are connected to emotions and affects. The latter are 'those forces – visceral forces beneath, alongside, or generally other than conscious knowing vital forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward movement, toward thought and extension... or that can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability' (Seigworth and Gregg 2010, p. 1). A focus on affects allows us foreground the body's capacity 'to affect and to be affected' by and during the religious event. We can explore in depth what we mean by the expressions like 'to feel something in one's bones', 'to love someone with every fibre of one's being', 'that was a kick in the guts', 'it left me breathless and speechless', or 'it got under his/her skin'. These expressions strain to grasp haltingly potent 'preverbal intensities' (Guattari 1995, p. 9) supported by autonomic nervous system responses that precede and overflow the Cartesian 'I think therefore I am'. Buddhism even poses the issue of precedence of the body and affects more radically, attributing the stabilized self to the dependent and fluid co-arising of these 'bundles' (*skandhas*) along with cognitions, volitions, and consciousness. Drawing from his fieldwork among the Oromo of Eastern Ethiopia, **Terje Ostebo** argues that religion and ethnicity are 'about the visceral experience of selfhood, of how people exist in the world'. Moreover, 'they are intimately tied to the natural-cultural landscapes to which and within which we belong', the deeply felt embodied memories of belonging to a group located in a particular place.

Donovan Schaefer (2015) draws creatively from affect studies to challenge the ideology of human exceptionalism and its accompanying linguistic fallacy – the refusal to analyse religion and power outside language and texts – to recover religion's 'animality', the visceral intensities that we share with non-human animals. As he asks:

What would happen if we subtracted the framework of human exceptionalism from religion, following the Darwinian turn to an animalist understanding of human religious expression? What if religion is not only about language, books, or belief? In what ways is religion – for humans and other animals – about the way things feel, the things we want, the way our bodies are guided through thickly textured, magnetized worlds? Or the ways our bodies flow into relationships – loving or hostile – with other bodies? How is religion made up of clustered material forms, aspects of our embodied life, such as other bodies, food, community, labor, movement, music, sex, natural landscapes, architecture, and objects? (Schaefer 2015, p. 3)

These are questions that, as we shall see a little later, begin to expand the scope of turn towards materiality beyond the body, nesting the much needed explorations of

embodiment within 'ecologies of life', the dynamic webs in which human and non-human animals are entangled with each other and with things and environments. But before we move in that direction, it is important to highlight another set of contributions to the reinvigorated interest in the body in religious studies. In addition to affect, the aesthetics of religion is inextricably tied to bodily posture and motion. Drawing from the works of Maxine Sheets-Johnstone (1999) and Brian Massumi (2002) and from his experiences as a dancer and in the classroom, teaching religion and dance, Sam Gill has argued for the 'primacy of movement', the insight that motion is foundational for our sense of self, as well as our perceptions of others and our environments. For 'we are born into the world not with concepts and consciousness, but as moving bodies. We do not learn how to move as we come to life even in the womb and after we are born; we come with movement as identical to life itself. Life means movement from beginning to end' (Gill 2012, p. 14). The focus on bodily posture and motion opens the space to explore religion as performance, be it through dance, acting, chanting, doing yoga, playing (and watching) sports (Alpert 2015), or gaming (Campbell and Grieve 2014).

Writing also as scholars and practitioners and adding performance studies¹⁹ to the mix, **Harshita Mruthinti Kamath** and **Joyce Burkhalter Flueckiger** explore 'corporeal-kinetic learning', to put it in Sheets-Johnstone's words, in classical Indian dance. They consider the materials, from saris to circular *bottus* on the forehead and bells on the ankles, as well as the 'bodily labour' that go into producing multi-layered and efficacious sensory experiences that are key for inculcation of knowledge of Hindu traditions in diaspora.

Beyond opening up all these invigorating vistas, a renewed focus on the body also has important methodological implications, which hitherto have been not fully explored in the study of religion. In his excellent *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer*, Loic Wacquant stresses 'the necessity of a sociology not only of the body, in the sense of object, but also from the body, that is, deploying the body as tool of inquiry and vector of knowledge' (2004, p. viii). For Wacquant, doing 'carnal sociology' demands the practice of an 'enactive ethnography' (2015, p. 2), 'an embedded and embodied social inquiry, based on physical co-presence with(in) the phenomenon in real time and space' (2015, p. 4). In other words, enactive ethnography places the 'physical person [of the fieldworker] on the line' (2004, p. 3), plunging him/her into an 'initiatory immersion and even moral and sensual conversion to the cosmos under investigation' (2004, p. vii). More specifically, to develop a 'vibrant, full-color' account of the 'pugilistic practical sense' which is 'impregnated' upon the boxer's body through a long, arduous, and rigorous training regime, the ethnographer must move from participant observation to 'observant participation' in the 'minute and mundane rites of daily life in gym' (2004, p. 6).

What would religious studies from the body look like? Does enactive ethnography require the scholar of religion to become an initiate in the tradition s/he is studying, in effect turning him/her into an advocate, a 'care taker' rather than a critic as Russell McCutcheon (2001) puts it? These are challenging questions that taking the body seriously as 'at once the seat, the instrument, and the target' of action (Wacquant 2004, p. 16) for both the religious practitioner and the practitioner of *Religionswissenschaft* make inevitable. These questions may not have a one-size-fits-all answer, requiring instead

the constant, reflexive negotiation in situ of the demands stemming from the embodied competences instilled by the religious and scholarly communities. If Gill, Kamath and Flueckiger offer a guide, a carnal religious studies would mean an openness to the efficacy of the religious event, to the full material infrastructure that, to draw from phenomenologist Michel Henry (2008), makes (religious) appearing(s) appear for flesh-and-bone individuals. At the very minimum, it would mean a fuller, multi-sensorial, full-bodied engagement in 'the taste and the ache of action, the sound and fury of the social [and religious] world[s]' (Wacquant 2004, p. vii), adopting more creatively experimental and self-reflexive postures that render more porous and uncertain the boundaries between the emic and the etic, the insider's practices and the outsider's gaze (which is after all a practice and the product of its own embodied dispositions and material conditions), upon which critical perspectives like those of Bruce Lincoln (1996) and McCutcheon are built.²⁰

1.3.2 Bodies and Things in and of the Material World

For all of its contributions, the constructionist approach inspired by Foucault and Bourdieu has been rightly taken to task for its tendency to view the body in passive terms, as 'providing the primary "raw material," the presocial "base" upon which the collective categories and values are engraved... [becoming] a "simple piece of wood each has cut and trimmed to suit him"' (Comaroff 1985, p. 7).²¹ In the most totalizing version of this approach (in some of the work of Butler), the physical body disappears under the deluge of self-referential discourse. But, as Comaroff notes, the ethnographic record amply demonstrates the body's generativity, how it affords and constrains specific experiences and offers biological metaphors of birth, growth, alimentation, reproduction, ageing, and death that come to represent socio-cultural processes. This is illustrated in **Robin Wright's** chapter on the spiritual and physical body of Kuwai, one of the most important spirits in Hohodene cosmology. In this case, Kuwai's body is not simply the source of metaphors to understand the order of things, but his body, his organs, fluids, orifices, and hair, are the sources of life and death itself, of everything that is vital in Hohodene culture from shamanic powers to heal and kill, to sacred rocks, places, musical instruments, and chants.

How can we take seriously this alternative ontology in which Kuwai's body is the 'one and the many', in which Kuwai 'embodies simultaneously the multiplicity and unicity of the universe, expressing how the material and spiritual body is one with the plethora of living entities'? In engagement with the ontology of medieval Christianity, an ontology that also does not fit Western modernity's dualisms, Bynum (2011, p. 32) has called for a 'move beyond study of "the body" to [the] study of matter'. And so that we do not think that this is an issue relevant only for an enchanted past, her call comes a time when, because of neoliberal capitalism's over-production, reliance on consumerism, and the commodification of culture and knowledge to extract surplus, we are more than ever surrounded by a 'profusion' of things (Appadurai 2006). With globalization and transnational migration even those vast sectors of the world's population who do not have access to many of these material goods, desire them intensely or are deeply

offended by them, as we saw in the case of the Taliban at the beginning of this introduction. **Knut Jacobsen's** piece on Hindu and Sikh processions in Norway illustrates how ritual bodies and objects intermingle to create powerful public displays of loss and sorrow and to carve out identity and dignity away from the homeland in turmoil.

It is important to clarify that Bynum is not calling us to abandon altogether the fruitful focus on the body. Rather we must 're-situate' body, approaching it not just as a more naturalized and historicized notion of the human self, but as part of living matter. Standing in the materialist Aristotelian tradition, medieval thinkers 'understood "body" to mean "changeable thing": gem, tree, log, or cadaver, as well as living human being. Understood in medieval terms, to explore "the body" was to explore stars and statues, blood and resin, as well as pain, perception, and survival' (Bynum 2011, p. 32). In other words, to capture more richly the generativity of the body, the affordances and constraints it presents, including the capacity to produce the representations through which we experience (it) meaningfully, we must recuperate the dynamicity and fecundity of matter itself, of which the body is made and in which it exists.

Hitherto, there have been two broad efforts to craft this more robust, expansive materialism. The first one has a more constructionist character. Bruno Latour and other Actor-Network theorists have taken the Foucaultian insight that power and subjectivity are not essences that individuals possess and exercise but are, instead, relational processes, and have applied it to the question of agency. Actor-Network Theory (ANT) is 'a semiotics of materiality. It takes the semiotic insight, that of the relationality of entities, the notion that they are produced in relations, and applies this ruthlessly to all materials – and not simply to those that are linguistic' (Law 1999, p. 4). Moreover, ANT 'tells us that entities achieve their form as a consequence of the relations in which they are located. But this means that it also tells us that they are *performed* in, by, and through those relations' (Law 1999). 'An "actor" in the hyphenated expression actor-network is not the source of action but the moving target of a vast array of entities swarming toward it. Action is borrowed, distributed, suggested, influence, dominated, betrayed, translated' (Latour 2005, p. 46).

In ANT, agency emerges in the interplay of heterogeneous assemblages of 'actants', which include not just humans but also a variety of non-humans. Within these associations, the various actants 'enroll', co-opt, or align with each other in order to generate relatively durable social outcomes. Thus, in his study of how Pasteurization became a widespread policy in France, Latour challenges the heroic view of history that centres on Louis Pasteur's genius in his struggle against germs. Latour argues that a dense and heterogeneous network of physicians, hygienists, government officials, scientific journals, test tubes, microscopes, sterilizing substances, and microbes interacted to stabilize a scientific view of illnesses that guaranteed the public acceptance of Pasteurization. As Latour (2010, pp. 19–20) puts it, '[t]he laboratory becomes, so to speak, the prosthesis allowing the ferment of lactic acid to speak as well as Pasteur; it allows the articulation between Pasteur and "his" ferment, between the ferment and "its" Pasteur'. In other words, agency is not something that belongs intrinsically to humans as sovereign, fully intentional, en-souled subjects standing over against the 'inert' or machinic (material) non-human entities. Rather, there is a wide range of agentic modalities. '[T]here might exist many metaphysical shades between full causality and sheer in-existence: things

might authorize, allow, afford, encourage, permit, suggest, influence, block, render possible, forbid, and so on' (Latour 2004b, p. 226). By 'dehumanizing' agency and recovering 'the missing non-human masses' as efficacious actors without which society could not be achieved, ANT widens considerably the scope of study of materiality beyond the body, as called for Bynum.

Building on Latour and ANT, Matthew Day (2010), **David Morgan** (2014), and Vásquez (2011) have called for an understanding of various religions as evolving, agentic, heterogeneous networks that may involve priests, prophets, monks, missionaries, immigrants, pilgrims, healers, tourists, and scholars alongside texts, relics, icons, money, embodied habituses, architectural styles, and notions of honour and prestige. Several chapters in this *Companion* exemplify the benefits of this relational view of agency and materiality. **Greg Johnson**, for example, shows how the circulation of ancient Hawaiian religious objects following the *Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act* (NAGPRA) does not simply 'reanimate' tradition and a sense of community, but also transforms the bodily dispositions and skills of those who come in contact with them. Amongst the Makah, 'objects of lore (e.g., seal skin floats, specially woven fiber ropes, and mussel shell-tipped harpoons, as well as a range of ritual objects) were suddenly objects of touch, feel, and gesture. Makah people expressed understandable fascination with and appreciation for the material mastery of their ancestors, as well as gestural curiosity about the objects. How would they use this float or that harpoon? How was it held or thrown? What somatic re-education would be needed to viscerally comprehend the point and power of the harpoon? This gestural curiosity soon crystallized in a desire to hunt once again'.

Johnson's focus on the circulation in and out of sacred objects within networks and fields dovetails very nicely with Morgan's recent call to 'make materiality evidential' and to develop robust methods, rather than simply approaching it with a theoretical attitude, as part of a paradigm shift in religious studies in the Kuhnian sense. Building on Arjun Appadurai's and Igor Kopytoff's notions of the 'social life or the biography of things' (see Appadurai 1986), Morgan (2017) argues for 'framing the study of an object's materiality in a series of steps that follow it from production to use', a trajectory that requires the analysis of nine aspects: 'medium, design, manufacture, function, comparison, remediation, deployment, reception and ideology or cultural work'. He puts this frame to work in the *Companion* in his textured analysis of Sacred Heart of Jesus, in which he also engages Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizome²² to produce an 'account that is not strictly linear, but a network, a reverberation between object and everything we see beyond it that has gone into crafting the object'.

For his part, **Paul C. Johnson** writes eloquently about how, 'spirit possession' in Candomblé is 'the ritual expression of competent material and bodily work', a work demanding careful 'assemblages of bodies, spaces and things [that] facilitate and even constitute the "presence" of gods, spirits or ancestors'. The public presencing of these beings requires that

the proper material context has already been carefully built... such that the orixá [spirit]'s incorporation is the outcome of accumulated material labor carried out over days of preparation, including the preparation of the right foods, the right decorations, the right

clothing, and the right aural context, each of which themselves act on the dancer and the audience – whether through sound, smell, taste, physical solidity or permeability-shaping their thoughts, moods, potentialities, inclinations and movements. This assemblage of actants and modes of agency, interacting together with individual will, produce the field called *axé* and the incorporated *orixás* who serve to channel and perform its various material and historical manifestations – thunder, war, prosperity, beauty, water, soil, disease, political rule, kinship, technology, plants, wind ...

Day notes rightly that Latour and ANT also challenge the denial of coevalness that is closely related with secular modernity's rejection of religion, which, as we saw above, is associated in the modern mind with the intimate interaction and ontic shifts amongst human, non-human animals, plants, things, and spirits. Science understood these ontic shifts as the projections of primitive thinking, as naïve forms of fetishism or shamanism. Apparitions, miraculous icons, and beliefs in shape-shifting shamans are all misattributions of causality that modern science shatters with facts. But Latour (1993) shows that 'we have never been modern', or rather that the 'moderns' also depend heavily on and interact closely with things and technologies. Try, for instance, to separate us from our iPhones and Androids, which are constantly interpellating us. As such, what we have are not facts opposed to fetishes, but 'factishes', constructed-yet-binding facts that emerge from historical, contested-yet-stable 'regimes of enunciation'. Factishes, 'quasi-objects', or 'weak objects', that is, hybrids constructed out of the mixing objects and words 'do things, they too make [us] do things' (Latour 2004b, p. 243). At a time when there is glib talk of 'alternative facts', it is important to stress that Latour is not advocating for a self-contradictory relativism, which can follow from crude readings of postmodernism. Quite the contrary, Latour is deeply concerned that a totalizing constructionism has severely weakened critique.²³ As he puts it, for ANT, '[t]he question was never to get away from facts but closer to them, not fighting empiricism but, on the contrary, renewing empiricism' (p. 231). Reading ANT in a materialist key, we can say that it brings us back to our bodily enmeshment in the plethora of things amongst which we exist and which we have ignored for too long in our reductive textualist concern. ANT foregrounds the affordances²⁴ that things offer us, as well as to their obduracy, the constraints that they present as we encounter them through our bodies, which as we have seen, are bio-cultural realities. This entanglement of material agencies, which has to be approached with fine-tuned tools that allow us to document the coming together of the various assemblages, is what gives rise to our lived worlds.

The task then is not to debunk religion, but to understand comparatively the "conditions of felicity" of the various activities that in our cultures are able to elicit truth'. In many religions, these conditions of felicity include not just human ritual labour in the production of trained bodies and purified, auspicious spaces, but also the work of 'transcendental beings' like gods, spirits, and impersonal forces. Should a non-reductive materialism not take them into account as key actants in the heterogeneous gatherings that make possible many a religious phenomenon?

Why not say that in religion what counts are the beings that make people act, just as every believer has always insisted? That would be more empirical, perhaps more scientific, more

respectful, and much more economical than the invention of two impossible non-existing sites: one where the mind of the believer and the social reality are hidden behind illusions propped up by even more illusions. (Latour 2005, p. 235)

In other words, Latour challenges us to break with the modernist doxa in religious studies and ‘*grant the gods their agency*’ (Day 2010, p. 278). For, ‘as long as they make a difference in what people do, the gods are *real actors* with *relative existence*’ (pp. 280–281, emphasis in the original). Thus, scholars of religion need to ‘start attending to the networks from which these actors emerge and the labor required to make them real and obvious’ (p. 281). Day goes on to write that a networks approach to religion can help us overcome the unproductive impasse between emic and etic perspectives and between criticism and care-taking (McCutcheon 2001). We can

kick the habit of treating those ‘non-obvious beings’ that fill the pages of books about religion as if they were stand-ins for something else. The gods, ghosts, spirits, and prophets that speak are not ciphers for ‘Society’ (e.g., Durkheim), ‘Culture’ (e.g., Geertz), or ‘Economy’ (e.g., Marx). Rather, they are one of the many non-human actors who circulate within a given network: agents who make their presence felt by sharing the labor required to gather, attach, move, motivate or bind their fellow actors together into a social aggregate. (Day 2010, p. 278)

Defining ‘non-obvious beings’ as actants within particular networks has opened new spaces to develop a rich anthropology of the ‘uncanny’ and of the alternative ontologies that may accompany it (Goslinga 2013). For instance, studying ghosts and spirits in Buddhist festivals in Laos could involve analysing ‘under which circumstances they appear to which people. This would imply a focus on the multifaceted regimes of communicability that evolve between humans and spirits’ (Ladwig 2013, p. 431). After all, ‘ghosts can be beings with desires, with taste, with biographies. They appear in specific ways at places at a certain time; they slip into objects, they live in them, they consume things, leave material traces and demand a certain treatment as social beings’ (p. 428). Thus, our task as scholars of religion inspired by a non-reductive materialist turn is to trace the ‘tracks’, ‘footprints’, or ‘imprints’, the signals ‘left in the material domain of something that in conventional ways is not graspable for most people not endowed with special capacities to do so... the trace itself can point to the immanence of a being through its material manifestations’ (p. 431).

In this *Companion*, **Kay Read** presents a pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican view of the cosmos as ‘complex, intertwined, fertile, comestible’, as characterized by structured-yet-dynamic food webs that establish ‘symbolic and physically real sacrificial relationships involving cooking, eating, fertility and war’ among humans and the gods. Both humans and gods are efficacious actors; they sacrifice and are sacrificed. ‘Sacrificial blood is and begets nourishment; people and gods cook and feed each other out of debt for their own mutual existence. Just as gods nourished each other, so too is the merit of all humans’. Along the same lines, **David Carrasco** borrows from Paul Wheatley to describe pre-Hispanic Mesoamerican cities as ‘ecological complexes’ in which ‘agriculture, technology, warfare, exchange, and territory were *integrated* through a religious

imagination', a 'cosmo-magical thinking' that 'provided elites with divine authority and persuasiveness to shape the city as an *imago mundi*, an earthbound image of the cosmos'.

Reference to ecology and ontology brings us to the second line of inquiry into materiality, which has a more ontological tenor. It ratifies the constructionist emphasis on relationality and dynamism, but grounds it in a new understanding of matter as intrinsically generative. Building on thinkers such as Epicurus, Lucretius, Spinoza, Nietzsche, Bergson, Merleau-Ponty, Whitehead, and Deleuze, the 'new materialists' move from views of nature as mechanistic or passive vis-à-vis humanity's creative agency towards an understanding of matter as 'vibrant' and auto-poietic, i.e. self-propelling, self-creating, and self-organizing. Political scientist Jane Bennett uses the term 'thing-power' to affirm 'material recalcitrance', the 'capacity of things – edibles, commodities, storms, metals – not only to impede or block the will and design of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own' (Bennett 2010, p. viii). For the new materialists,

materiality is always something more than 'mere' matter: an excess, force, vitality, relationality, or difference that renders matter active, self-creative, productive, unpredictable. In sum, new materialists are rediscovering a materiality that materializes, evincing immanent modes of self-transformation that compel us to think of causation in far more complex terms; to recognize that phenomena are caught in a multitude of interlocking systems and forces and to consider anew the location and nature of capacities for agency. (Coole and Frost 2010, p. 9)

The new materialists subscribe to a non-dualistic, immanentist ontology: 'if matter itself is lively, then not only is the difference between subjects and objects minimized, but the status of the shared materiality of all things is elevated. All bodies become more than mere objects, as the thing-power of resistance and protean agency are brought into sharper relief' (Bennett 2010, p. 13). Bodies – human and non-human – and the practices they make possible are the products of 'differential patterns of mattering' (Barad 2007, p. 140), the outcomes of the 'intra-action' of social fields, discursive matrixes, and neural and ecological webs. Here, the notion of intra-action stands 'in contrasts to the usual "interaction," which presumes the prior existence of independent entities or relata' (p. 139). These entities/relata only have agential separability with the material phenomena they generate through their intra-action. Within the 'swarms of vitalities at play', 'different materialities ... will express different powers' (Bennett 2010, p. 31).

To characterize this enmeshment, Tim Ingold (2011, pp. 89–94) introduces an ecological dimension, challenging Latour for assuming that 'the materiality of the world... is fully comprehended in the things connected'. For Ingold, relationality and the distributive, delegatory properties of the network that in Latour's eyes give rise to our fashions, are themselves grounded in and enabled and constrained by materiality itself, 'by the material media in which living things are immersed'. Ingold sees reality not as 'an assemblage of bits and pieces but a tangle of threads and pathways. Let us call it meshwork, so as to distinguish it from... networks. My claim, then, is that action is not the result of an agency that distributed around the network, but rather emerges from

the interplay of forces that are conducted along the lines of the meshwork', the webs which are not only anchored in nature but are part of it. In that sense, '[b]ringing things to life, is a matter not of adding to them a sprinkling of agency but of restoring to them the generative fluxes of the world of material in which they came into being and continue to subsist. This [is the] the view that things are in life rather than life in things' (Ingold 2011, p. 29), which was the simplistic way in which anthropologists characterized primitive religion, i.e. animism, since E.B. Tylor.²⁵

Echoing the new materialists and Ingold's ecological anthropology, object-oriented ontologists and speculative realists like Timothy Morton speak of 'hyperobjects', things like global warming that, while closely entangled with humans, transcend temporal and spatial human scales, actively shaping our range of actions.²⁶ Hyperobjects are 'viscous, which means that they "stick" to beings that are involved with them' (Morton 2013, p. 1). Despite our best efforts to insulate ourselves from them through language (of denial), '[o]bjects are what they are, in the sense that no matter what we are aware of, or how, there they are, impossible to shake off' (p. 35). In that sense, 'hyperobjects end the possibility of transcendental leaps "outside" physical reality. Hyperobjects force us to acknowledge the immanence of thinking to the physical' (p. 2). This is because 'it's not a matter of making some suicidal leap into the honey, but of discovering that we are already inside it' (p. 32). Lest we think that this is a return to a naïve realism and oppressive essentialism so dreaded by constructionists, Morton points to the fact that even though we have an embodied 'vivid intimacy' with climate change, we cannot grasp or control the totality of its causes, dynamics, and effects. Hyperobjects 'are near, [yet] they are also very uncanny', involving a highly complex meshwork of actors, processes, and events (p. 28).

Thus far, the new materialists have been reluctant to 'grant gods their agency', as the Latourian constructionists suggest, for fear of succumbing to dualism or to 'the temptation in vitalism to *spiritualize* the vital agent' (Bennett 2010, p. 81, emphasis in the original). They wish to remain faithful to a radically immanent plane. Coole (2010, p. 92), for instance, ask 'is it possible... to grasp matter's dynamic and sometimes resistant capacities, without relying upon mysticisms derived from animism, religion, or romanticism?' Here, the new materialists might be operating with a one-dimensional view of religion, one that is even at odds with Ingold's call to 'rethink the animate and re-animate thought' (2011). If the new materialists were to see religions as situated practices, discourses, spaces, and objects that negotiate the interplay of transcendence and immanence, of absence and presence, as we argued above, they could offer, along with ecological anthropologists and speculative realists, more productive tools to make sense of what Jennifer Scheper Hughes (2012, p. 17) calls '*mysterium materiae*, the mystery of living matter', i.e. that fact that within communities of devotion certain objects are not simply external expressions of inner belief, but they are themselves lively, transgressively abundant. In fact, they may even be regarded, felt as persons by the religious practitioners. Thus, *mysterium materiae* is to be distinguished from Rudolf Otto's *mysterium tremendum et fascinans*, which is all about internal states vis-à-vis the Sacred. Take Bynum's work on Christian materiality. She stresses 'the self-referentiality' of this materiality: images and relics do 'not merely signify... a power that lies beyond'. 'In their insistent materiality', they 'do

more than comment on, refer to, provide signs of, or gesture to the divine' (2011, pp. 35, 66). Rather, these images call attention to their materiality qua materiality, 'not only to the materials of which they are made (crystal, gold, gems) but also to the materials (bones, cloth, wood) they contained, displaying their wondrous transformational power'. This is why Bynum finds Latour and other constructionists limited. They give things only 'metaphorical agency; it is like that of human actors. Typewriters, keys, ploughs, statues, and relics shape those who employ them. They come closest to acting when they come closest to living – that is, to being like a human agent' (p. 281). While Latour's proposal for a 'parliament of things' (Latour 1993, pp. 142–145), where humans give non-humans recognition and the right 'to talk', is inclusive and opens the way to think materiality, power, and agency in innovative ways, it remains in the thralls of anthropocentrism and, thus, pray to the dualism that has led to the denigration of matter in the first place.

Reflecting on his fieldwork amongst the Runa of Ecuador's Upper Amazon, Eduardo Kohn (2013, p. 7) has called for 'an anthropology beyond the human' that can help us understand 'how forests think', that can allow us to appreciate 'the ecology of selves', the web of relations that the Runa sustain with a dazzling array of non-human beings with whom they share the tropical rain forest. In my view, this appreciation is one of main pay offs of the turn to materiality in religious studies: it leads to a more capacious, complex, and dynamic understanding of agency. The multifariousness of matter affords diverse forms of agency – well beyond the unproductively rigid borders established by Western modernity pitting humans (active subjects) vs. non-humans (passive objects) (Latour 2004a). Indeed, Kohn's work is part of the 'ontological turn' in anthropology that seeks to de-colonize the discipline and 'provincialize Europe' (Chakrabarty 2000), taking seriously the viability of non-Western modes of being. For Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, a leading voice in this turn, this is a return to the roots of anthropology. 'Anthropology is alterity that stays alterity or, better, that *becomes* alterity, since anthropology is a conceptual practice whose aim is to make alterity reveal its powers of alteration' (Viveiros de Castro 2011, pp. 145). In his work on indigenous peoples of the Amazons, Viveiros de Castro contrasts Western 'multi-culturalism', which presupposes 'the mutual implication of the unity of nature and the plurality of cultures – the first guaranteed by the objective universality of the body and substance, the second generated by the particularity of spirit and meaning' – with Amerindian 'multinaturalism', which assumes 'spiritual unity and a corporeal diversity. Here, culture or the subject would be the form of the universal, whilst nature and the object would be the form of the particular' (Viveiros de Castro 1998, pp. 469–470). Thus, in multinaturalism, the focus is on 'the conception, common to many peoples of [South America], according to which the world is inhabited by different sorts of subjects or persons, human and non-human, which apprehend reality from distinct points of view' (p. 469). Working with similar materials, Philippe Descola (2013) has argued that our modern world-view, in which nature is 'the domain of objects that [are] subject to autonomous laws that form a background against which the arbitrariness of human activities [can] exert its many-faceted fascination' (p. xv), is but one modality of inhabiting the

world and giving it meaning, existing alongside animism, totemism, and analogism, each with its own operative notions of agency and relationality.

The strategy of contrasting distinctive ontologies carries the danger of Orientalism, opening the door for long-discredited structuralist theories about the 'separate but equal' logics of primitive mentalities.²⁷ It may be more fruitful and prudent to think of porous, often hybrid-yet-binding perspectives articulated by the coming together of networks of agents, materials, landscapes, and events, some of which are shared, some of which are not, allowing thus for compatibility as well as incongruence, coalition-building as well as agonism across time and place. Nevertheless, Kohn's, Viveiros de Castro's, and Descola's efforts to relativize our taken-for-granted worldview are valuable. They point to the need to think at the limits of our Western understandings of materiality, to theorize and research materialities in the plural and comparatively.²⁸ **Anne Murphy**, for example, shows how relics in the Sikh tradition, though puissant signifiers of authority and collective memory, do not function like relics do in Christianity and Buddhism, along the lines that Bynum and Hughes describe so well. This difference has to do with 'fundamental *nirgun* (non-material) commitments of Sikh thought and practice to that which lies beyond representation'. Like anthropology, the discipline of religious studies deals with alterity within and amongst traditions and, to paraphrase Viveiros de Castro, it is our task to explore the diverse ways in which materiality makes possible for alterity to reveal its powers of alteration.

1.4 The Collection

This collection seeks to encourage the comparative studies of materialities across historical periods and religious traditions. The contributions are divided according to some of the currently most salient foci of interest in the study of religion and materiality. These foci should not be understood as fixed, definitive, and self-contained categories, but heuristically, as theoretically and methodologically strategic points of entry into the poly-faceted, interconnected, and shifting maze of religious materialities. For example, **Tom Bremer**'s essay on religion and tourism is included under the rubric of practices and performances to highlight how travel and consumption is connected with the production of authenticity. However, the chapter touches on issues of place-making and mobility, the power of capitalism via commodification, and the quest for real embodied experiences of unspoiled nature and unfamiliar peoples, among other things. In a similar way, **Whitney Sanford**'s chapter is in the section on food and commensality; yet, it also addresses ritual practices and the formation of emplaced communities, sustainable livelihoods versus conventional, capital-intensive agriculture, and the well-being of the body and environment. All the other chapters could, likewise, have been placed in multiple sections, with each placement inflecting the materials in certain ways. I hope that this chapter has illuminated some of the potentially fertile points of contact, tension, and passage among a luxuriant array of chapters that evince the great promises of the comparative study of religious materialities.

Notes

- 1 See www.un.org/press/en/2001/ga9858.doc.htm.
- 2 This verse appears in the Qur'an, 6:74.
- 3 <http://groups.colgate.edu/aarislam/msells.htm>.
- 4 Assessing the legacy of the Enlightenment, Foucault points not to particular concepts, foundations, or institutions, but to 'an ethos of permanent critique of our historical era' that is 'oriented toward the "contemporary limits of the necessary," that is, toward what is not or is no longer indispensable for the constitution of ourselves as autonomous subjects'. Applied to the study of religion, a limit-attitude requires us to ask constantly what are those assumptions, concepts, and approaches that were considered indispensable but have become, in fact, an impediment to developing rich and compelling understandings of religions in all their complexity, diversity, change, and interaction with other socio-cultural and ecological dynamics.
- 5 Thus, I agree with J.Z. Smith's understanding of comparison as an exercise of positioned imagination, of departing from alterities that are salient for the researcher (and the practitioner), from 'differences that make a difference' to quote the pragmatism's adage, placing the phenomena brought into creative comparison in their proper contexts. Smith (1982, 2000). Salience understood here in Merleau-Ponty's sense: as the dynamic outcome of flesh coiling upon itself, of the flesh of our bodies touching and being touched by the flesh of the world.
- 6 I borrow the term from speech-act theory, which uses it to characterize the necessary conditions to make the performance of an utterance successful, giving the latter its expressive, assertive, declarative and directive force. See Austin (1962).
- 7 For example, the Second International's quest for a scientific historical materialism.
- 8 Chris Hann rightly takes current anthropology of Christianity to task for neglecting the role of Eastern Christianity in shaping modernity, including modern understandings of materiality. He goes even further, challenging the usefulness of the Weberian thesis about the unique link between Western Christianity, more specifically Protestantism, and modernity (via rationalization, disenchantment, secularization, privatization, and entextualization), seeing this thesis as an impediment to a broader comparative focus on diversity and tensions within the Christian 'civilization'. See Hann (2007, 2014).
- 9 As Pietz (1985, p. 16) writes, the 'problem of the fetish' 'arose within and remains specific to a particular type of cross-cultural experience first engaging European consciousness in ongoing situations on the West African coast after the fifteenth century'. Notice here how the construction of fetishism is a 'dialogical' process, involving colonizer and colonized in an asymmetric relationship.
- 10 On Indian philosophy, see King (1999b) and Radhakrishnan (2009). I thank Vasudha Narayanan for her invaluable input in my brief characterization of materiality in Hindu traditions.
- 11 For a more extended critique of this linguistic reductionism, particularly as articulated by early Jacques Derrida and Judith Butler, see Vásquez (2011).
- 12 That is what Keane suggests when he focuses on the 'semiotic ideology' of Calvinism in order to see how Christian missionaries situated 'words, things, and persons (along with other agentive beings such as spirits) dynamically within the same world with one another' (2007, p. 18) through their discursive practices.
- 13 By biopower (or alternatively biopolitics), Foucault meant 'the disciplines of the body and the regulations of the population [that] constituted the two poles around which the organization of power over life was deployed', beginning in the seventeenth century

- (Foucault 1978, p. 139). He also coined the neologism 'governmentality' to make sense of the expansion of the scope of political power beyond the Crown after the sixteenth century. From then on, "government" did not refer only to political structures or to the management of states; rather, it designated the way in which the conduct of individuals or of groups might be directed – the government of children, of souls, of communities, of the sick ... To govern, in this sense, is to control the possible field of action of others' (2003, pp. 326, 341; see also Foucault 2008, pp. 108, 193).
- 14 More recently, Giorgio Agamben has built upon and gone beyond Foucault to understand the operation of power in the contemporary 'state of exemption', 'a legal civil war that allows for the physical elimination not only of political adversaries but of entire categories of citizens who for some reason cannot be integrated into the political system' (Agamben 2005, p. 2). Thus, whereas Foucault speaks of power over the desires and capacities of the body, Agamben seeks to address power over 'bare life' ('zoepolitics') and he uses the notion of *homo sacer* (from Roman law, the sacred man, sacred the sense of being radically set apart, a man who is banned, an out-law literally who can be killed by anybody with impunity, but may not be sacrificed as part of a sanctioned religious ritual). While Agamben developed his approach in relation to the authoritarian Nazi state, it has been used to study the suspension of juridical rights during the war on terror post-9-11. Vásquez (2014) also drew from it to analyse the figure of the 'illegal' immigrant.
 - 15 Malabou uses the term plasticity to emphasize the process of becoming, since it implies a certain degree of fixity and systematicity, as well as flexibility and open-endedness, the capacity to mould and to be moulded, not least through self-ordering dynamics.
 - 16 See Birgit Meyer on the 'aesthetic of persuasion' of Pentecostalism, which uses 'sensational forms', that is, 'authorized modes of invoking and organizing access to the transcendental' that enable the powerful and visceral religious experiences (Meyer 2010, p. 751).
 - 17 See also the influential work of David Morgan (2005) on religious visual culture.
 - 18 Shaun Gallagher (2005, p. 234) defines body schemas as 'nonconscious system[s] of processes that constantly regulate posture and movement – system[s] of motor-sensory capacities that function below the threshold of awareness, and without the necessity of perceptual monitoring'. Mirror neurons are associated with learning skills and instinctive-yet-culturally appropriate reactions through imitation and empathy, as they fire not just when the person acts, but when the person witnesses others performing. See Rizzolatti and Craighero (2004).
 - 19 Richard Schechner (2002) is key in this area.
 - 20 For an ethico-methodological reflection on embodiment, see Marquardt and Vásquez (2014). Orsi points in the same direction in his call to approach scholarship as relationality and exchange, an 'in-between orientation', 'a disciplined suspension of the impulse to locate the other (with all her or his discrepant moralities, ways of knowing, and religious impulses) securely in relation to one's own cosmos'. Robust and nuanced research entails 'experiencing one's own world from the disorienting perspective of the other... and this necessarily entails risk, vulnerability, vertigo; it invites anger and creates distress' (Orsi 2005, pp. 198, 204). Despite the emphasis on contextualization and historization in their approaches to religion, the dualisms set up by Lincoln between 'good manners' and 'good conscience' and by McCutcheon between critics and caretakers operate with a view of the scholar as a disincarnate analyst. The sociology of critique (rather than critical sociology) explores the dynamics of domination and resistance, not from the point of view of the sovereign scholar, whose privileged externality allows him/her to unmask ideologies unproblematically, but from the

- multiple points of views of the actors in situ who have in-corporated contested procedures for evaluating and legitimating their actions to others. Embedded, embodied experience of the religious practitioner's lifeworld is, thus, less about reverence, than about methodological rigour. See Boltanski and Thevenot (2006).
- 21 Paradoxically, neuro-cognitive research programme on the body can also construe it in static and passive terms, as the stabilized outcome of a long biological evolution. E. O Wilson, one of the more nuanced proponents of epistemology behind this programme puts it thus: 'The genes hold culture on a leash. The leash is very long but inevitably values will be constrained in accordance with their effects on the human gene pool' (1978, p. 167).
 - 22 Deleuze and Guattari (1987) refer to two planes of becoming: 'arborescent', which seeks firm foundations by establishing fixed dualities and linear and hierarchical connections ultimately grounded on a centralized axis, and 'rhizomatic', constituted by a myriad of heterogeneous, proliferating, and deterritorializing connections.
 - 23 Latour notes how critique has been normalized and co-opted: 'entire Ph.D. programs are still running to make sure that good American kids are learning the hard way that facts are made up, that there is no such thing as natural, unmediated, unbiased access to truth, that we are always prisoners of language, that we always speak from a particular standpoint, and so on, while dangerous extremists are using the very same argument of social construction to destroy hard-won evidence that could save our lives' (Latour 2004b, p. 231). Against this co-optation, he calls for 'bring[ing] the sword of criticism to criticism itself' (p. 227) and for the 'cultivation of a stubbornly realist attitude', an ethos that '*adds* reality to matters of fact and not *substract* reality' (p. 232).
 - 24 Ecological psychologist James Gibson introduced this term to highlight the dynamic complementarity between the animal and its environment. The latter's physical aspects furnish possibilities for action to the animal, possibilities that are perceived and realized through the animal's physicality and activities. Affordances are '*relative to the animal*. They are unique for that animal. They are not just abstract physical properties. They have unity relative to the posture and behavior of the animal being considered. So, an affordance cannot be measured as we measure in physics' (Gibson 1986 [1977], p. 127). Thus, the notion allows for a realism that eschews both positivism and relativism, since it foregrounds embodiment, emplacement, practice, and identity, but without slipping into an everything-goes kind of subjectivism.
 - 25 For a creative recovery of animism that resonates with the turn to materiality in religious studies, see Harvey (2014).
 - 26 Speculative realism is a kaleidoscopic philosophical movement, but its proponents commonly reject Kantian 'correlationism', the idea that everything is reducible to the experience of the transcendental subject, to phenomena as humans perceive it. Against this anthropocentrism, they insist that there is a world not only not exhausted by human constructs (thus the realism), but that this world is vital in the emergence of human consciousness from its midst. As Morton puts it, 'the problem is not that things are truly distant, but that they are in our face – they are our face' (2013, p. 28). Given the 'stick mesh of viscosity' in which we find ourselves, we cannot achieve objectively neutral, universal, and totalizing accounts of our reality (thus the speculative character of the realism). For a good example of speculative realism, see Meillassoux (2008).
 - 27 To be fair, Descola is careful to stress that the various 'ontological parcels' he characterizes are primarily 'a handy intuitive way of synthesizing under a simple label (such as "the Modern West" or "shamanistic societies") "families" of practices and mind-sets that seem to display affinities

despite the diversity of their concrete manifestation' (2013, p. 309). Still, his structuralist approach seems to underplay the 'links that they weave between one another, the ways they affect one another, and the manner in which they treat one another [which] can all vary through and through' (p. 310).

- 28 Latour himself has relativized his take on networks. They are 'just one, somewhat heterogeneous mode of existence' (Tresch 2013, p. 304). See also Latour (2013) and his exchanges with Viveiros de Castro and Descola.

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