Course Description:
Playing drums, performing stories, touching stones, creating wildly colorful altars, dancing, eating and drinking special substances are all basic religious activities. Religions are deeply, stubbornly physical and sensual. This class aims to re-imagine approaches to religion by grounding them in physical encounters between human bodies and sensual objects. Examples will range across Buddhist, Hindu, Muslim, Christian, and Jewish rituals and symbols, and readings will cross from art history to anthropology to science, as well as religious studies. We will toggle between broad theories of religions and specific case studies. Most weeks will work comparatively, looking at particular sensual religious experiences across two or more traditions.

Course Materials:
Required texts:
• Other readings available via Blackboard (listed as "BB" below)

Recommended:
• Several related books will be placed on reserve

Course Requirements:
Final grades will be based on the following requirements.

Presence, 20% of final grade. This grade includes attendance and participation, but entails a more general sense of bringing both body and mind to the classroom for discussions. You are required to have read before class, coming prepared to discuss the readings and images. "Presence" means not coming to class and asking what you were supposed to have read; "presence" means listening to the others in the classroom; "presence" means not checking your watch every 10 minutes.

This course relies on informed comments by students on a regular basis. You will be graded on your ability to analyze and synthesize images and readings; on the frequency, relevance and insights of your comments; and on your ability to present your ideas coherently to the class. Presence grades will be calculated from: 1) my own notes from class sessions, in which I note who was significantly involved in discussion, and 2) your own self-assessment of your contributions to class discussion.

Weekly Blogs, 20% of final grade. One per week.
Approximately 200-300 words each. A blogsite will be set up for the course. Your entries should demonstrate at least one key theme or idea that you thought worthy of note in the week's readings and in class discussions. Include any and all relevant images in the post. The purpose is to engage the readings/viewings/listenings and to articulate your engagement succinctly and clearly in writing. Show why the material is important, what implications it might have for the study of sensual religion. A successful post will provide detailed evidence and references to specific passages (include page numbers). The goal of these posts is to have you begin organizing your thoughts so that you can be active participants in class discussion. In other words: Step One: Read/Watch/Listen; Step Two: Think; Step Three: Write.
They are to be posted every Tuesday evening by 8pm, except where noted. Your post can be formulated as a response to someone else’s post, but it must advance the discussion in some original and substantial way, and in relation to the week’s assignments. Be prepared to discuss your work in class. And because they are intended as conversation starters for the class, No late blogs will receive credit.

Sense Projects. Three in total, each worth 20% of final grade. Either Project One or Two can be rewritten and turned in later in the semester for a higher grade. Further information about each will be discussed in class. Basics are this: 2000 words for each essay.

Project One will be a Photo Essay. You will take five pictures on a particular theme of your choosing, related to the course topics, and write a supporting essay.

Project Two will be a Sound Essay. You will record five minutes of something audible on a particular theme of your choosing, related to the course topics, and write a supporting essay.

Project Three will be an Object Essay. You will choose one object from the Wellin Museum and write a supporting essay about it. You will also be required to give an 8-10 minute oral presentation on your object during finals week.

Writing
This is a Writing Intensive course, and thus writing will be key to all that we do. We will meet the WI requirement through individual meetings with Prof Plate to discuss student projects, through multiple written assignments, and the rewriting of one paper.

General grading levels for written assignments:

F -- fails to answer the questions or address topic, expresses little accurate information, and/or is not coherent.

D -- shows effort, but the information and explanation are weak. You need to make more references to the readings/topics/viewings.

C -- articulates what you think clearly. You need to engage in a more detailed and systematic way with the readings.

B -- explores why you think the way you do.

A -- reserved for excellence, when you use the material as a springboard for higher-level thinking. You elaborate a creative and original take on the readings, viewings, and issues, and you articulate your thoughts in your own voice. You go beyond stating your point of view to evaluate the pros and cons of thinking the way you do.

Reminder:
Studying religion is both an academic and a personal exercise. In your written assignments you will be graded on thinking and argumentation. I will not grade your personal beliefs or non-belief. Nor will I grade on the particular position you take. I will grade how well you articulate why you (or someone you are supporting) thinks this way, as well as your ability to reflect critically on the position you take.
## Course Outline:

### OBJECTS

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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<tr>
<td>Sept 3</td>
<td>In-Class: Intros to Class, Others, Objects. <em>Popular Mechanics</em> story on &quot;101 Gadgets that Changed the World&quot;</td>
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| Sept 5 | Readings:  
Turkle Intro, 3-10;  
MacGregor, Intro, xv-xxvi  
In-Class: Tell story of an object: something personal, something that affected you intellectually, emotionally, historically, etc. No blog this week. |

### RELIGIOUS STUFF

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| Sept 10 | Readings:  
Sexson, 1-25;  
(Anselm/St Marys Press, 2009): 67-78;  
Howes, David, "Charting the Sensorial Revolution" from *Senses and Society*, 1.1: 113-128 |
| Sept 12 | Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week |

### FACES

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<th>Date</th>
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| Sept 17 | Readings:  
Sexson, "The Flea's Shoes";  
MacGregor, "Icon," 431-436, and "Shiva/Parvati," 437-442;  
Eck, Diana L. Darsán, *Seeing the Divine Image in India*.  
In-Class: *The Face: Jesus in Art*, Images of Hindu deities |
| Sept 19 | Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week |

### PHOTOS

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<th>Date</th>
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| Sept 24 | Readings:  
Sexson, "Personal Events & Cultural Dreams";  
[Recommended: Stefan Helmreich, "SX-70 Camera" in *Turkle*]  
In-Class: Project prep day. Presentation by Prof Rob Knight, on photographs and documentation. Then, info about technology for your projects. |
| Sept 26 | Discussion of readings, viewings. |
| Sept 27 - Oct 2 | Individual meetings with Prof Plate to discuss Project One. Sign ups in class |

### GARDENS

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
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| Oct 1 | Readings:  
Sexson, "The First Act Repeated";  
Genesis 2;  
In-Class: Brakhage, *Earthly Delights* |
| Oct 3 | Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week |
### Dreams

**Oct 8**  
**Readings:**  
In-Class: Film clips on dreams

**Oct 10**  
Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

### Music

**Oct 15**  
**Readings:**  
MacGregor, "Chinese Bell" 191-194 and "Akan Drum" 561-5;  
In-Class: Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring,* Mickey Hart, et al.

**Oct 17**  
Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

### Silence

**Oct 22**  
**Readings:**  
In-Class: Cage, *4’11’’; Into Great Silence.*

**Oct 24**  
Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

### Dance

**Oct 29**  
**Readings:**  
{Recommend: Eden Medina, "Ballet Slippers" in Turkle}  
In-Class: Alvin Ailey "Revelations," Martha Graham, "Embattled Garden," "Lamentations"

**Oct 31**  
Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

### Cuisine

**Nov 5**  
**Readings:**  
MacGregor, "Maize God," 49-54;  
In-Class: Eat.

**Nov 7**  
Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week
### Fasting

**Nov 12**
- **Readings:**

**Nov 14**
- Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

**Nov 19-21**
- NO CLASS. Thanksgiving. Eat.

### Bread

**Nov 26**
- **Readings:**
  - MacGregor, "Pestle," 33-6;
  - Plate, S. Brent, "Bread" draft from *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects* (Beacon Press, forthcoming)

**Nov 28**
- Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

### Smoke

**Dec 3**
- **Readings:**
  - Plate, S. Brent, "Incense" draft from *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects* (Beacon Press, forthcoming)

**Dec 5**
- Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

### Museums

**Dec 10**
- **Readings:**
  - Paine, Crispin, chapters 1 and 3 from *Religious Objects in Museums* (London: Berg/Bloomsbury 2013)

**Dec 12**
- Discussion of readings, viewings, blogs for week

**Dec 20**
- 2-5pm. Final class session. Reserve for final presentations