

RELIGION 201 - Spring 2020
Ritual: Performance and Paradoxes

Tuesdays and Thursdays: 2.45 – 4.00, Seelye 105

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A central feature of religious traditions and lived religious experience, ritual is often thought of as repetitive, unchanging, and prescriptive. Yet, enacted rituals are often open-ended and allow considerable room for creativity and innovation. Through embodied action and symbolic drama, rituals serve complex functions of making meaning, deepening spirituality, performing cultural identity, and advocating for social change. In this course, students will study various theories of ritual and examine ritual practices (religious and secular) in diverse traditions and societies. For their final project, students will themselves participate in the process of ritualizing--that is, crafting new rituals.

{H} {S} 4 credits

From Catherine Bell, *Teaching Ritual* (2007):

"... *why* to teach ritual in so many different courses: it is one of the most representative ways of being religious, and it comes under the radar of our students to present the vaguely familiar in a fresh way. By recognizing the central role of ritual as the flexible backbone of traditions and the clearest illustration of how we orient ourselves within the cosmos, teaching religion is both theoretically central and pedagogically compelling." (pp. 4-5)

"... teaching ritual as a central feature of *religion*.... This marks an important change in the history of religions approach to both religion and ritual ... Teaching religion with a significant focus on ritual does not merely challenge our tradition of thinking about religion; it challenges every maturing religion major to try to make sense of the discrepancy in views about religion that they learn from other faculty." (p. 9)

"... current themes in religious studies, ritual studies, and anthropological studies: the local and the global; ritual and invention; performance and performativity; embodiment and communication; and ritual and human consciousness." (Andrew Strathern/Pamela J. Stewart, p. 134)

From Ronald L. Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (2014):

"Ritual is embodied, condensed, and prescribed enactment." (p. 195)

This course is designed to improve students' skills in a variety of areas, such as oral and written expression, critical reading and analysis, participating in small and large group discussion, offering constructive critique of others' work, and working collaboratively and creatively. To help develop their research skills and information literacy in the field

of religion studies, students should consult

<http://www.smith.edu/libraries/research/subject/religion>, and

<http://www.smith.edu/libraries/services/faculty/infolit/ilprograms/religionskills>

Course requirements:

Since this is a colloquium, the success of the course depends on **everyone's careful preparation of all readings and assignments and on everyone's readiness to engage in lively discussion**. We have much to learn from one another if we share our questions, thoughts, analyses, and observations—of texts and of actual rituals. These requirements are designed to help you develop your own understanding of the academic study of religion and of the phenomenon of ritual, and to facilitate the ways in which we all learn cooperatively from one another.

1. Regular attendance, diligent preparation, and active and *thoughtful* class participation, worth approximately 20% of final grade.

Repeated absences will result in a lowered grade for the course. Students are expected to have done the reading *before* class and to be prepared for discussion.

- To facilitate preparation for class discussions, **half of the students will post on Moodle for the Tuesday readings (due on Monday at 6 p.m.) and half of the students will post on Moodle for the Thursday readings (due on Wednesday at 6 p.m.)**. Posts may consist of the following: **at least *two* questions that puzzle you in the readings, or *two* issues you find useful or problematic in the readings, or *two* quotations from the readings that you consider worthy of in-depth discussion in class (or some combination of question, issue, or quotation)**. Students should post during 10 weeks for full credit.
- **One ungraded response paper, 2-3 paragraphs, due date T 2/4**: You will be asked to provide your initial response to the general question, “Why is ritual important?”
- **One ungraded response paper based upon museum visit, 1-2 pages, due T 3/31.**

2. One paper, 5 pages, double-spaced, that analyzes one or two theoretical approaches to the study of religion, due date: Th 2/25, worth approximately 25% of final grade.

Students will submit their topics to the instructors for approval. Students are encouraged to submit a draft of their paper to another student in the course for peer review.

3. One Op-ed essay, 2 pages (600 words), double-spaced, that addresses the importance of ritual within contemporary society, due date: Th 3/26, worth approximately 10% of final grade.

Students will compose this essay in an Op-ed style (rubric to be handed out in class).

4. One ritual created in a group and then enacted in class, due date: M 4/20, group's ritual text worth approximately 5% of final grade, group's ritual performance worth approximately 5% of final grade.

In a four-member group, students will create a ritual and provide a text for it (2-4 pages). The group will then enact the ritual during a class period in the final two weeks. Each group performance should last no more than 20 minutes and allow for 10 minutes of class discussion.

5. One essay, 5 pages, double-spaced, that offers an academic analysis of the ritual created by the student's own group, due date: M 4/20, worth approximately 25% of final grade.

Each student will provide an explanation of the ritual created by the student's own group. This essay should analyze what the ritual does, the rationale for the ritual's creation, and how the ritual applies theoretical frameworks.

6. One journalistic essay, 2 pages (600 words), double-spaced, that reports on a ritual of another student group, due date: 5/1 by 4:00 p.m., worth approximately 10% of final grade.

Each student will compose an evidence-based essay on another group's new ritual (rubric to be handed out in class).

Course Policies:

Academic Dishonesty: The Student Handbook notes the following:

Students and faculty at Smith are part of an academic community defined by its commitment to scholarship, which depends on scrupulous and attentive acknowledgement of all sources of information and honest and respectful use of college resources.

Smith College expects all students to be honest and committed to the principles of academic and intellectual integrity in their preparation and submission of course work and examinations. All submitted work of any kind must be the original work of the student who must cite all the sources used in its preparation.¹

If you have questions about what might constitute inadvertent plagiarism, please consult the instructors before you hand in your work.

¹ "Student Conduct & Social Responsibility: Academic Honor Code," Smith College, accessed September 3, 2019,

<https://www.smith.edu/sao/handbook/socialconduct/honorcode.php>

Late Assignment Policy: Unless authorized by an extension from the instructors, **late submission of work will be penalized**. If an emergency arises that requires you to ask for an extension, consult the instructors **before** the due date.

Accommodations for Students: If you have a disability or a personal circumstance that you think will affect your learning in this course, please let us know as soon as possible so that we can discuss the best ways to meet your needs. Students who need accessibility accommodations are encouraged to contact Disability Services (www.smith.edu/about-smith/disability-services) and obtain an official letter of accommodation.

Title IX Rights and Responsibilities: The Smith College Title IX website notes the following:

Gender-based and sexual misconduct is any unwanted and unwelcome sexual behavior that significantly interferes with a student's success or access to educational opportunities at the college. A student with a complaint alleging gender-based and sexual misconduct should report it to the Title IX Coordinator (Amy Hunter, ahunter65@smith.edu). Complaints regarding sexual violence (sexual assault, dating/domestic violence, and stalking) may also be reported to the Campus Police Department or the Dean of Students Office, Marge Litchford, mlitchfo@smith.edu. Complaints of gender-based or sexual misconduct between Smith College students or where the individual allegedly committing the misconduct is a Smith College student are governed by the Smith College Student Code and applicable state and federal laws.

Beyond this policy, you should know that we are mandatory reporters at the college. In the event that you experience a Title IX violation, you may talk to us, and we will keep your information private to the greatest extent possible. However, as professors, we have a responsibility to report any information regarding sexual misconduct and crimes that we learn about to make our campus a safe place for all. For further information about Title IX rights and related all-college policies, as well as support services, please consult the following webpage: <https://www.smith.edu/about-smith/title-ix>.

Computers and electronic devices: Students may use personal computers to take notes or read downloaded course materials, but any other use is not permitted in the classroom. Please turn off your cell phones during class. Unauthorized use of electronic devices—including texting—is disturbing to others. Your cooperation is appreciated.

General: Our goal is open inquiry, with engaged discussion and mutually respectful interaction. Let's all do our utmost to challenge and support one another in our work together. Along the way, if anyone has ideas about how the structure of the course and general classroom interactions could be altered to encourage greater inclusion and participation, please let us know.

Readings:

These books are available for purchase at Greccourt Bookshop and are also on Young Library Reserve:

Grimes, Ronald L., ed. *Readings in Ritual Studies* (Prentice-Hall, 1996).
 Stephenson, Barry. *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford Univ Pr, 2015)
 & e-bk via Smith Library catalogue.

Others readings are available in electronic format, reserve, or on the Moodle course site.

Note: “Opt. Bell” means the readings from Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* in brackets are optional (to be on RES and also e-bk).

Course Overview:

Part One: *Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion and Ritual* (Wk. 1)
 Part Two: *Theoretical Perspectives on Ritual* (Wks. 2-4)
 Part Three: *Tradition and Innovation in Ritual Performance* (Wks. 5-11)
 Part Four: *Creating Rituals: Presentation and Discussion of Students’ Work* (Wks. 12-13)

Course Schedule:**Part One: Introduction to the Academic Study of Religion and Ritual****Week 1. T 1/28 & Th 1/30 *Ritual in Popular Culture and Academe***

T -- Introduction, Course Organization, and the Academic Study of Religion and Ritual

Catherine Saint Louis, “Rituals Make Our Food More Flavorful,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2013.

Matthew Hutson, “The Power of Rituals,” *Boston Globe*, August 18, 2016.

David Brooks, "There Should Be More Rituals!" *New York Times*, April 22, 2019.

Handout on definitions of ritual and religion

Th -- Stephenson, *Ritual: A Very Short Introduction*, Introduction; chapter 2, page 26 (second paragraph); chapters 3, 4, 5, and 7.

Part Two: Theoretical Perspectives on Ritual

Week 2. T 2/4 & Th 2/6, *Ritual: Healthy/unhealthy? Meaningful/meaningless?*

T -- Sigmund Freud, "Obsessive Actions and Religious Practices," pp. 212-17, in Grimes, *Readings*; [opt. Bell, *Ritual*, pp. 12-15]

Tom Driver, "Transformation: The Magic of Ritual," pp. 170-87, in Grimes, *Readings*

Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Bare Facts of Ritual," pp. 473-83, in Grimes, *Readings*

Film in class (excerpt), *Ritual: Three Portraits of Jewish Life* (1990)

Th -- ***Structuralism and Functionalism***

Catherine Bell, *Ritual*, functionalism: 23-29, 38-39; structuralism: 33-35

Emile Durkheim, "Religion, Magic, and the Sacred," pp. 188-93, in Grimes, *Readings*

Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, selections

Mary Douglas, "Dirt: Purity and Danger," pp. 159-70, in Grimes, *Readings*; [opt. Bell, *Ritual*, 43-46]

Week 3. T 2/11 & Th 2/13, *Ritual as Rite of Passage and Cultural Symbol*

T -- Arnold Van Gennep, "Territorial Passage and the Classification of Rites," in Grimes, *Readings*, 529-36 [opt. Bell, *Ritual*, pp. 35-38]

Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process*, chs. 1 & 3, 131-140, 166-178 [opt. Bell, *Ritual*, 39-42].

Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, 202-3

Th -- Claude Levi-Strauss, "The Effectiveness of Symbols," pp. 368-78, in

Grimes, *Readings*; [opt. Bell, *Ritual*, pp. 42-43, pp. 61-top p. 64]

Clifford Geertz, "Religion as a Cultural System" (from M. Lambeck, *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*): only intro. pp. 61-2, definition on p. 63; healing rite pp. 71-top 72; ritual pp. 76-79, conclusion, p. 81

Clifford Geertz, "Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight," pp. 217-29, in Grimes, *Readings* [opt. Bell, *Ritual*, p. 64- top p. 68]

Week 4. T 2/18, *Ritual as Performance and Practice* (No class Th 2/20, Rally Day)

T -- Bell, *Ritual*, make a list of her 6 types in ch. 4, pp. 93-137 .

Bell, *Ritual*, pp. 50-51, p. 68 – top p. 70, p. 72 - top of p. 77, mid p. 81-mid p. 83

Grimes, "Defining and Classifying Ritual," chapter 7, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, pp. 185-207

Bell, "Ritual," in *The Blackwell Companion to the Study of Religion*, ed. by Robert A. Segal (New York: Blackwell, 2006), 397-411

Part Three: Tradition and Innovation in Ritual Performance

Week 5. T 2/25 & Th 2/27, *Old and New Rituals: Repetition, Variation, and Invention*

T -- Grimes, "Liturgy," pp. 43-45, in "Modes of Ritual Sensibility," in *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*

Bell, *Ritual*, pp. 210-225, 231-242, 251-252, 262-264

Grimes, "Defining Nascent Ritual," pp. 53-69, in *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, & introduction to *Deeply Into the Bone*

Theodore Jennings, "On Ritual Knowledge," only sec. "Ritual as Coming to Know," pp. 326-328 in Grimes, *Readings*

Th -- Barbara Myerhoff, "We Don't Wrap Herring in a Printed Page: Fusions and Continuity in Secular Ritual," in *Secular Ritual*, ed. Moore and Myerhoff

Myerhoff, "Death in Time," p. 399, in Grimes, *Readings*, on "fixed" & "open"

Week 6. T 3/3 & Th 3/5 *Catholic Pilgrimage Sites: Then and Now*

T -- Virginia Reinburg, “Storied Place Land and Legend at Notre-Dame de Garaison,” *French Historical Studies* 40.3 (2017): 391-407.

Th -- Anna Fedele, “Introduction” and “The Sainte-Baume and Its Many Layers,” in *Looking for Mary Magdalene: Alternative Pilgrimage and Ritual Creativity at Catholic Shrines in France* (Oxford University Press, 2013), 3-28, 83-122.

Week 7. T 3/10 & Th 3/12

T -- *Unconventional Takes on Ritual*

Adam Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences* (Intro and chapter 1)

Rapoport, “The Obvious Aspects of Ritual,” in Grimes, *Readings*, 427-434

Th -- *Transformation by Migration*

Shampa Mazumdar and Sanjoy Mazumdar, “The Articulation of Religion in Domestic Space: Rituals in the Immigrant Muslim Home,” *Journal of Ritual Studies* 18: 2 (2004), pp. 74-85

Karen Leonard, “Mourning in a New Land: Changing Asian Practices in Southern California,” *Journal of Orange County Studies* 34 (1989-90): 62-69

SPRING BREAK

Week 8. T 3/24 & Th 3/26 *A New Holiday: Kwanzaa*

T -- Film in class, excerpts, *The Black Candle*

Packet: selections including material from officialkwanzaawebsite.org

Keith A. Mayes, *Kwanzaa: Black Power and the Making of the African–American Holiday Tradition* (selections from chapters 2-4)

[Opt. Bell, 235-237]

Th -- Smith College Museum of Art, “Black Refractions” exhibit

Week 9. T 3/31 & Th 4/2 *Case Studies: Exploring Our Own Rituals*

T -- Rabbi Riqi Kosovske (no reading necessary)

Th -- Susan Sered and Linda Barnes, “Teaching Healing Rituals/Ritual Healing,” in Bell, *Teaching Ritual*, pp. 195-208

Lois Dubin, "A Ceremony of Remembering, Mourning, and Healing after Miscarriage," *Kerem* 4 (1995-6): 67-79

Bardwell Smith, "Buddhism and Abortion in Contemporary Japan: Mizuko Kuyo and the Confrontation with Death," pp. 458-73, in Grimes, *Readings*

Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies*, pp. 237-241: Elements of Ritual, expanded

[Opt. Meredith McGuire, "Words of Power: Personal Empowerment and Healing," *Culture, Medicine, and Psychiatry* 7 (1983): 221-240]

Week 10. T 4/7 & Th 4/9 *How to Create a Ritual*

T -- Jim Clarke, *Creating Rituals: A New Way of Healing for Everyday Life*, Introduction

Debra Orenstein, *Life Cycles*, volume 1, "Afterword: How to Create a Ritual"

Vanessa Ochs, "Setting a Cup for Miriam," and Susannah Heschel, "Orange on the Seder Plate," in *The Women's Passover Companion*

Th -- Grimes, Chapter 3, "Divining Mates" in *Deeply into the Bone*

Nadia Bolz Weber, "[Liturgical Naming Rite for a Transgender Church Member](#)"

Part Four: *Creating Rituals: Presentation and Discussion of Students' Work*

Week 11. T 4/14 & Th 4/16, *In-class Preparation for Presentations*

Week 12. T 4/21 & Th 4/23, *Student Presentations*

Week 13. T 4/28 & Th 4/30, *Student Presentations and Course Wrap-up*