

Spring 2016

**RELU9AP – Theology, Religion and Postmodernity**



**'Believe Anything'** by Barbara Kruger, Hirshhorn, Washington DC

**Course convenor:** Dr Francis Stewart (E17 Pathfoot)

**Course lecturer:** Dr Francis Stewart

**Office:** A11 Pathfoot (01786 46 75 06)

**Contact details:** [francis.stewart@stir.ac.uk](mailto:francis.stewart@stir.ac.uk) or twitter @fstewartrelstir

**Teaching times:**

Monday 14:00 – 16:00 Pathfoot C1

Tuesday 14:00 – 15:00 Pathfoot D2

**Office hours:**

Tuesday 3 -4pm

Thursday 11 -12pm

**Course description:****Course aims and objectives**

This module seeks to develop an understanding of contemporary postmodern culture in regards to its relationship with the divine, the sacred and the ineffable. It will explore different ways in which individuals and groups have either embraced or reacted to the post-modern ideology of religious, moral, cultural and political pluralism. These will be critically examined through multiple lenses ranging from the fantastical and imaginative (examples may include Game of Thrones, current Biblical epics such as Exodus and Noah) to that of political theology (concepts of freedom, sovereignty, secularism). The post-modern notion of fragmentation will also be explored and critically examined through various attempts to redefine what religion is or can be.

**Course specific:**

1. To introduce students to the theory of postmodernity in relation to religion and culture, its critics and specific proponents of its theories
2. To introduce aspects of the study of religion through postmodern approaches within popular culture, within and out with the West to enable a critical and comparative analysis
3. To engage with the role of narrative rather than autonomy and transcendence in exploring issues related to religion and its interaction with culture(s)
4. To understand the importance of disaffection in relation to postmodernist approaches to and understandings of religion, politics, economy, culture, relationships and being through its appearance and use in art, literature, music, visual media and meaning making
5. To explore and engage with the notion of fragmentation as it constitutes a key aspect of postmodernism, especially in relation to the question of what religion is, or can be and why

**Academic courses generally:**

1. Be in a position to understand and deploy the arguments of key critical theorists in approaching issues.
2. Encourage intelligent use of a variety of theories and methods of study
3. Appreciate and engage appropriately with language studies, fieldwork, social surveys and the visual and performing arts, as required for the subject being studied
4. Demonstrate a strong analytical ability with the capacity to formulate questions and address complex problems
5. Be able to formulate research questions and be able to plan responses in recognised academic style(s)
6. Demonstrate the critical facility of reading texts of great intellectual demand, and then transferring these critical skills to coherent written analysis and commentary.

**Teaching format**

This course will be co-ordinated and taught by Dr Francis Stewart, but students will be expected to take a very active role, not just in undertaking the readings but in shaping and leading discussion. Each week there will be a 2 hour class which will consist of a student seminar presentation (assessed) and a lecture with discussion, this will be on a Monday.

There will also be a 1 hour class on a Tuesday which will be dedicated to the emerging field of material religion as a means of understanding the relationship between religion and postmodernity. This will be a very interactive and practical based class. It will consist of a mix of short talks, student led explorations and practical sense based activities.

Some important points:

- The two hour lecture will be constructed as a student led seminar (from week three onwards) for the first 45 minutes, a staff led lecture and discussion (1 hour) which will introduce the theme for the following week's seminar presentation and an opportunity for presenters to have a private discussion with staff.
- To help students gain the greatest possible benefit from the lectures, staff will endeavour to put relevant notes on 'Succeed' the day before each lecture. It is really important that students realise that just downloading these notes will NOT be an adequate substitute for attending the lecture.
- Students should endeavour to read the relevant material for each week prior to the lecture so that during the second part of the lecture they can engage with the lecturer in relation to their reading, and then engage more fully with the material in the seminar later in the week. This will also ensure that students build up a coherent understanding of the development and mutation of evolving current theories.

Therefore the expectations on students are:

- The taking of lecture notes (written or recorded or both as suits personal learning styles) and be prepared to discuss the topic contents
- Prepare for each seminar presentation and participate in the discussion of other students presentations
- Present a properly researched presentation bearing in mind it will be graded
- Be prepared to come out of their comfort zones and fully partake in the interactive aspects as well as the student led presentation of the 1 hour Tuesday class on religion and materiality – this includes the preparation necessary (which will be assessed – see below). As part of this it is YOUR responsibility to inform staff (privately) of issues that may arise, such as allergies, especially if they are not indicated to the university through an ARUA

### **Seminar presentations**

The purpose of seminar presentations is to enable students to develop their own understanding and application of that week's theme. They are also intended to build on and develop the employable skills of speaking to a group of peers, presenting ideas in an engaging and informed manner, demonstrate leadership and group work skills. To those ends:

- Each student will be required to make at least one (probably joint) presentation on a specific theme and to lead the discussion that follows
- Seminars leader(s) are responsible for finding relevant materials, though staff will help in advance as much as possible
- Seminars only work if everyone (and not just the seminar leaders) prepares appropriately in regards to the material and is ready and willing to discuss the topic from an informed perspective

- Seminar presentations are assessed (see below)
- Detailed oral and written feedback will be provided to the presenters

### Overview of course

| Date          | Topic  | Requirements   |
|---------------|--|--|
| 18.1          | Introduction, key terms, concepts, seminar sign ups  |  |
| 19.1          | Overview, being ½ , presentation guidance, sign ups  |  |
| 25.1          | The death of God controversy and the post-modern turn to religion                                |  |
| 26.1          | Stones   | Bring a small object that matters to you             |
| 1.2           | Public religion 1 – capitalism, Marxism and socialism  |  |
| 2.2           | Incense  | Bring something whose smell is important to you      |
| 8.2           | Public religion 2 – capitalism, branding of faith / faith in brands                              |  |
| 9.2           | Drums  | Bring something whose sound matters to you           |
| 15.2          | Public religion 3 – popular culture and religion   |  |
| 16.2          | Crosses  | Bring something that is visually important to you    |
| 21.2          | Mid semester break – no classes  |  |
| 22.2          | Mid semester break – no classes  |  |
| 29.2          | Public religion 4 – popular culture as / alternative to religion                                 |  |
| 1.3           | Bread  | Bring a small piece of food that is important to you |
| 7.3           | Alternative theologies 1 – liberation and post-colonial theology                                 |  |
| 8.3           | Student presentation – sight   |  |
| 14.3          | Alternative theologies 2 – feminist and queer theology   |  |
| 15.3          | Student presentation – sound   |  |
| 21.3          | Vision of an alternative society – capitalism ‘rejection’, spirituality of nature / body / place |  |
| 22.3          | Student presentation – smell   |  |
| 25.3          | Deadline for emailing proposed essay question<br>Sign up for meeting using form on office door   |  |
| 28.3          | Easter Monday – no classes (university closed)   |  |
| 29.3 –<br>1.4 | Appointments for essay question discussion   |  |
| 29.3          | Student presentation – touch   |  |
| 4.4           | Human condition, postmodernity and the postmodern god  |  |
| 5.4           | Surprise finale  | Clean socks  |
| 22.4          | Final essay submission deadline 5pm  |  |

### Assessment

Assessment for this module is calculated as follows:

50% for essay

25% for seminar presentation

15% for material religion group presentation

10% for material religion reflective writing piece / essay

This is the link for University policies in regards to feedback for assignments.

<http://www.stir.ac.uk/feedback/>

In general feedback for presentations will be provided within 48 hours via email, feedback for the reflection writing will be provided on the paper within 1 week (you can collect from A11) and staff will endeavour to return all feedback on final essays within two weeks.

### **Seminar presentation (25%)**

Students need to do at least one seminar presentation (likely it will be with someone else) for 25% of their total grade, making it a serious component of the course. The purpose of a seminar is twofold; first it gives students who express themselves better orally a chance to improve their overall. Second, it provides a means for all students to access and engage with the material in a different way from that of a formal lecture, thus ensuring a broader depth of understanding.

The verbal delivery of the presentation should be at least 15 minutes for a single student and 20 – 25 minutes for a joint presentation. Leave 25 – 30 minutes for whole class discussion. The criteria for grading the seminar presentations are:

1. Intellectual coherence, clarity and relevance to the topic
2. Signs of wider reading and personal research
3. Seminar leadership skills such as clarity and interest of delivery, discussion questions usefully focused on essential points, organisation of material, chairing of group discussion or debate, ability to summarise the presentation (including drawing in aspects of the class discussion)
4. Quality of teaching aids, in particular the hand out (make sure you bring enough copies)

As should be evident from the criteria, students running of the seminars will be formally graded, as well as other aspects such as content, delivery and presentation. Students are strongly encouraged (although it is not mandatory) to provide printed handouts summarizing the main points of their presentation. Handout must be easily readable (bear in mind font choices as some of your peers may have additional needs such as dyslexia or vision issues that will impact on this) and must not exceed 3 pages of A4. This will help everyone follow the main gist of your talk without providing them with so much information that they don't bother to take additional notes and engage with your ideas in that way. How you choose to summarise such information is up to you, bullet points are fine (and indeed encouraged). Any source texts or quotes used must be fully and clearly referenced.

If you want your lecturer to make the copies for you, it is your responsibility to ensure that you send it to her at least 2 hours before the start of class. You must give it to her as a hardcopy, not an email attachment. If she is not in her office when you call to bring it, you can simply slip it under the door. Make sure your name and seminar details are clearly written on it.

### **Material religion presentation (15%)**

Students will work in groups of three or four to create an audio visual / interactive presentation related to one of the five senses and linked with a specific chapter in S. Brent Plate's "The History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects." This will be explained in significantly more detail in the first class and modelled by the course convenor until mid-semester break. Student groups will begin their presentations after this. You must not give your material religion presentation in the same week you give your seminar presentation.

Your 15% grade will be based on evidence that you have:

- understood and applied the chapter reading to the material and sense related world around us
- created innovative / interactive ways of presenting that material to your peer group
- effectively communicated your ideas
- been willing to take risks to explore the boundaries of your understanding

You should not create a handout for this presentation; it is intended to be active and participatory rather than note or writing based.

### **Material religion written reflection (10%)**

This course is designed to enable you to engage with a range of disciplines, including sociology, anthropology and religious studies. A key component of research in each of these is observation and reflection. This assessment piece is designed to help you develop those skills further and demonstrate your own reactions to experiences. You are expected to write a 1000 word reflective piece on your experiences and what you learnt by undertaking the making and presenting of your material religion presentation.

This is an opportunity for you to include yourself in your writing and so consider articulating how you felt on undertaking particular aspects or what the experience sparked you to think about. This can include pictures (not included in your word count).

Your reflective piece of writing must be handed in as a hardcopy only, with a cover sheet, into A11 within one week of you making your group presentation. Your writing piece is an individual affair and each group member must write their own reflection. These will be graded and returned within a week.

### **Essay (50%)**

You are required to write a 3,000 – 3,500 word essay which will be due two weeks after the ending of the course. It must be submitted by 5pm on the 22<sup>nd</sup> April as both a hardcopy into A11 (with cover sheet completed and attached) and as a digital copy via Turnitin. Both copies must match one another and both must be submitted by the deadline. If one is late they will both be considered late and you will be penalised accordingly.

You will in consultation with the course convenor create your own essay question. You must email your essay question to the course convenor by March 25<sup>th</sup> at 4pm. You will then be asked to sign up for a specific time to come and discuss the question, this will be undertaken the following week. By

Friday the 1<sup>st</sup> April (yes I realise the irony) you and the convenor will have an agreed upon question and resource list for you to work from. You may not change the title once it has been agreed with the convenor.

Given the length of the essay you must have at least 5 sources from the readings for this course (including the resources for the section on material religion) and listed in the handbook. While there is no obligation for you to use internet sources, if you choose to do so please note that a maximum of one third of your total sources can be from the internet. The rest must come from books, journals etc. Please note that any journals accessed online (and they are increasingly moving from print to e-journals) that are academic in nature and peer reviewed are not considered to be online or internet sources, but rather counted as if they were ordinary print journals and so not included in your one third.

*The use of Wikipedia, about.com and other websites of this ilk are not allowed.*

You must use full and correct references, and the style of referencing you use must be consistent throughout the whole essay. Your bibliography does not count in your word count, and must be on a separate page. Your essay must include your student number as a header on every page, page numbers and a final essay count at the end of the essay. Failure to include these or to reference correctly will be penalised.

If you require an extension request to be considered, you must make the application to the course convenor who is the only person who can grant an extension. These will not be granted unless there are exceptional circumstances to be taken under consideration – your own lack of planning or time management is not an exceptional circumstance. Essays will be accepted late for up to 7 days after the deadline, you will lose 3% per day that it is late. After 7 days your essay will not be accepted or marked.

You should back up your work early regularly and in multiple places (i.e. on your computer AND on a memory pen or virtually in something like the cloud or google docs). All computers break down at some point, so computer failure will not be accepted as an adequate reason for essay extensions. Staff will *endeavour* to return your marked essays between 2 -4 weeks after the submission deadline, as per university regulations. However things can happen that students may not be made aware of and this can impact upon the time it takes to return essays; please do not add to the time it takes to mark essays by emailing asking when the essay will be returned. You will be informed via an announcement on succeed that your essays are available for collection.

*How to write a good essay:*

Provide evidence that you are or have

- Familiar with the relevant primary sources, and with the relevant academic debate at the level of secondary sources.
- A coherent answer to the question: a step-by-step argument that leads from your introduction (setting out the issues and how you will tackle them) all the way to your conclusion (your final, carefully considered point of view).

- Clarity of thought and presentation.

A clear structure: the overall structure of your essay or research paper should be intellectually and visually clear and properly supported:

- Use line spaces to separate sections and indentation to indicate paragraphs.
- Each paragraph should convey one point or step in your argument.
- Make the steps of your argument crystal clear, linking each section or pointing to the next so that your reader is never lost.
- Outline the structure of the paper/essay in your introduction and use subheadings to further alert your reader to the progression of your argument.
- Avoid general statements unsupported by specific examples but always be careful to subordinate your evidence and sources to the point you are making, thereby incorporating the work of others (properly referenced) into your own argument. Never let a quote speak for you.

*Grading scale:*

| Mark    | Equivalent Grade | Result | Descriptor of Attainment of Learning Outcomes  |
|---------|------------------|--------|--|
| 90+     | 1st              | Pass   | Meets all the requirements to attain 80 – 89 but in addition demonstrates an exceptional degree of originality and exceptional analytical, problem-solving and/or creative skills.   |
| 80 -89  |                  |        | Meets all the requirements to attain 70 – 79 but in addition demonstrates outstanding quality evidenced by an ability to engage critically and analytically with source material, exhibits independent lines of argument, is highly original and uses an extremely wide range of relevant sources where appropriate. |
| 70 - 79 |                  |        | Exemplary range and depth of attainment of intended learning outcomes, secured by discriminating command of a comprehensive range of relevant materials and analyses, and by deployment of considered judgement relating to key issues, concepts or procedures   |
| 60 - 69 | 2:1              | Pass   | Attainment of virtually all intended learning outcomes, clearly  |



|         |                    |      |   |
|---------|--------------------|------|---|
|         |                    |      | grounded on close familiarity with a wide range of supporting evidence, constructively utilised to reveal appreciable depth of understanding.   |
| 50 – 59 | 2:2                | Pass | Attainment of most of the intended learning outcomes, some more securely grasped than others, resting on a circumscribed range of evidence and displaying a variable depth of understanding.  |
| 40 – 49 | 3 <sup>rd</sup>    | Pass | Acceptable attainment of most intended learning outcomes, displaying a qualified familiarity with a minimally sufficient range of relevant materials, and a grasp of the analytical issues and concepts which is generally reasonable, albeit insecure. |
| 30 - 39 | Fail -<br>Marginal | Fail | Appreciable deficiencies in the attainment of intended learning outcomes, perhaps lacking a secure basis in relevant factual or analytical dimensions.  |
| 0 - 29  | Fail -<br>Clear    | Fail | No convincing evidence of attainment of intended learning outcomes, such treatment of the subject as is in evidence being directionless and fragmentary.  |
|         | Fail               | Fail | Failure to comply with published requirements   |

The undergraduate scale can also be accessed here:

<http://www.stir.ac.uk/regulations/undergrad//assessmentandawardofcredit/>

The descriptions of what each grade band represents are useful to you in two ways:

- Before you submit a piece of work ask yourself where on the scale your work sits and try to improve it
- After you receive a grade for your work look at the criteria to understand why you were awarded that grade and what you need to do to reach the next grade up (or more)

**When things go wrong:**

Anyone can hit a bad patch or be overwhelmed with unexpected circumstances. However it is very important in these cases to get in touch with the module co-ordinator as soon as you can. In genuine cases there is often something that can be done. Students who fail to advise us about problems will find it much more difficult to sort things out. Do not put your module grade or your own peace of mind at risk. Talk to someone who can help as soon as you become aware of a problem.

You will also be represented by fellow students on the student-staff consultative committee which meets twice each term. If you have concerns about the management of the module itself then you should, of course, voice your concerns to the tutor and / or module co-ordinator as soon as possible, but your SSCC representative will also be able to bring matters up in a more formal and anonymous context should you feel this to be necessary.

### **Academic policies**

Details of relevant policies and regulations concerning attendance, assessment, academic misconduct (plagiarism), can be accessed from <http://www.stir.ac.uk/arts-humanities/about/literature-languages/lcrinformation/>

The undergraduate handbook can be accessed from <http://www.stir.ac.uk/media/schools/artsandhumanities/english/LCR%20Student%20Handbook%20Autumn%202014.pdf>

You can access and download the cover sheet for your final essay from [http://www.stir.ac.uk/media/schools/artsandhumanities/documents/Cover\\_Sheet\\_English.pdf](http://www.stir.ac.uk/media/schools/artsandhumanities/documents/Cover_Sheet_English.pdf)

*Please note it is the responsibility of the student to know and observe these policies*

### **Detailed outline of the course:**

**Monday 18.1** – overview of course, key terms, introduction to concepts, seminar sign ups

**Tuesday 19.1** – introduction, overview, sign ups and the concept of being ½

### No student presentations or readings

**Monday 25.1** – The death of God controversy and the post-modern turn to religion

The so called radical theology of the 1960s and the wider culture that feed into it and its main concern to debate whether God was dead or not. The resultant theological liberalism and its role on the civil rights movement in the Southern American states. The post-modern response to religion as Derrida's 'religion without religion'.

### *Required reading:*

Virgil Nemoianu, *Postmodernism and Cultural Identities: Conflicts and Coexistence*, (Washington DC: The Catholic University of America Press) Chapter 7 'The Insertion of Religion' p103 – 121

Thomas J. J. Altizer, *New Gospel of Christian Atheism*, (Aurora CO: The Davies Group Publishers, 2002) p1 -8, 97 – 122

*Recommended reading:*

Gianni Vattimo, John D. Caputo & Jeffrey W. Robbins, *After the death of God*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009)

Robert R. Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition and the Death of God: studies in Hegel and Nietzsche*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013) part 4 'God beyond the death of God'

**Tuesday 26.1** – stones

The use of stones to tell the history of religion, the use of stones in theories of religion. Stones as a means of understanding the importance of the sense of touch in an approach to engaging with religion, considering what religion is and why.

S. Brent Plate, *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014) p23 – 59

No student presentations

**Monday 1.2** - Public religion 1 – capitalism, Marxism and socialism

Weber's location of capitalism within Protestant cities, What is the impact of capitalism on religious belief? Does religious belief / spirituality alter or become destroyed as social roles become more stratified and mechanised? Efforts to link religion and capitalism to create a more socialist Western society (how can we understand and study religion within this dynamic) for example, Christian socialism, worker priests and liberation theology. Understandings and applications of capitalism, Marxism and socialism outside of the West and the questions they raise.

*Required reading:*

Andy Merrifield, *Magical Marxism: Subversive Politics and the Imagination*, (London: Pluto Press, 2011) Introduction p1 -23

George Gonzalez, *Shape Shifting Capital*, (London: Lexington Books, 2015) Introduction

*Recommended reading:*

Jeremy Carrette & Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2005) p1 -53 (there are multiple copies of this book in the library)

Socialism and Religion. New York: Secular educational society of New York, by permission of the Socialist party of Great Britain. 1923 (This is in Stirling library as part of the special references collection. You may have to request it and you will not be allowed to leave the library with it, so if you want to use it you may need to make a photocopy of the relevant pages.)

David McLellan, *Marxism and Religion: a description and assessment of the Marxist critique of Christianity*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1987) – a little dated now and has come in for some heavy criticism, but helpful to read bearing in mind it was the midst of the Wall Street boom and heavy consumer debt in the USA and UK.

Student seminar presentation – The Death of God Controversy, the post-modern turn to religion.

Provide a summary of the Nemoianu reading and the Altizer reading. Raise key points and questions from the texts. Consider why the question of the death of god was such a controversy (what other factors tied into it?) and what it tells us about how we categorise and understand the concept of religion. Considering Derrida's religion without religion, how does Nemoianu's treatment of identity connect with it, make it easier / harder to understand. Can it be applied outside of the West?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Tuesday 2.2 – incense –**

Using incense to explore the history of religion. The role of incense in a range of religious traditions, rituals and practices. The co-modification of incense as a means of selling 'spirituality'. The importance of the sense of smell in engaging with religion as a category and as a means of studying 'religion'.

S. Brent Plate, *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014) p61 – 97

### **Monday 8.2 – Public religion 2 – capitalism, branding of faith / faith in brands**

The relationship between market structure, competition and economy and how it impacts upon understandings of the nature and role of religion in post-modern societies. Responses to market economies by different religions. The development of religion (and spirituality) as a marketing tool.

#### *Required readings:*

George Gonzalez, *Shape Shifting Capital*, (London: Lexington Books, 2015) Chapter 4 'The Shape Shifting Metaphorical body of Capital'

Tricia Sheffield, *Religious Dimensions of Advertising*, Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2006), chapter 4 'The Religious Dimensions of Advertising in the Culture of Consumer Capitalism' p 101 – 131

#### *Recommended readings:*

Adam Arvidsson, *Brands: meaning and value in media culture*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006)

Celia Lury, *Brands: the logos of the global economy*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2004)

Mara Einstein, *Brands of Faith: marketing religion in a contemporary age*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2007) chapter 3 (p 37 – 66) and 9 (p 192 – 210)

Jeremy Carrette & Richard King, *Selling Spirituality: The Silent Takeover of Religion*, (London: Routledge, 2005) p123 – 168

### **Student presentation – public religion 1: capitalism, Marxism and socialism**

Provide a summary of the Merryfield and Gonzalez reading, draw out key points and questions from them. How convinced are you by Merryfield's assertion of a new means of imagining Marxism, and can you find any application for it in relation to the category of religion and how that is understood within postmodernism? What do you think of Gonzalez's claim that "approaches which understand capitalism only in discursive terms risk granting a socially embedded and historically contingent

financial system the air and aura of inevitability”? How do you understand workplace spirituality and what role can you see it having in developing or contributing to an ongoing understanding of the study of religion, especially in non-Western settings / contexts?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Tuesday 9.2 – drums**

Using drums to explore the history of religion. The role of drums in a range of religious traditions, rituals and practices. The centrality of the sense of sound in engaging with religion as a category and as a means of studying ‘religion’.

S. Brent Plate, *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014) p99 – 135

### **Monday 15.2 – Public religion 3 – popular culture and religion**

The historical relationship between religion and popular culture as evidenced through art, literature, film and TV series. The significant theorists and thinkers in this field – Adorno, Nietzsche, and Tillich. Exploring the category of religion within popular culture and locating popular culture within the category of religion. Has there been a trivialising of morality and religious / spirituality within popular culture media? A new *lingua franca*? –Jean Francois Lyotard as a means of talking of religion and popular culture and the importance of metanarratives (especially within filmic and Television based media).

#### *Required readings:*

Chris Klassen, *Religion and Popular Culture: A Cultural Studies Approach*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), chapter 1 ‘Religion and Popular Culture’.

Bruce David Forbes and Jeffrey H. Mahan (ed), *Religion and Popular Culture in America*, (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2005) chapter 8, Michael Jindra ‘It’s about faith in our future: Star Trek fandom as cultural religion.’

#### *Recommended readings:*

Thomas Bossius, Andreas Hager & Keith Kahn-Harris, *Religion and Popular Music in Europe: new expressions of sacred and secular identity*, (London: I.B.Tauris, 2011) chapter 2, Marcus Moberg, ‘Christian Metal in Finland: Institutional religion and popular music in the midst of religious change.’

Adam Possami, *Religion and Popular Culture: A hyper-real testament (2<sup>nd</sup> edition)*, (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2007) chapter 5 ‘New Forms of religious identification carried by popular culture’ p85 – 104.

Terry Ray Clark & Dan W. Clanton jr (eds), *Understanding Religion and Popular Culture*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2012) p 1 -27

### **Student presentation – public religion 2: capitalism, branding of faith / faith in brands**

Provide a summary of the Gonzalez and Sheffield readings, pull out key points and questions from each text. What do you think of the treatment of Gonzalez in regards to Weber’s notion of the boundary erected between economic and non-economic calculus? What is your view of the case study

of 'Seeing Things Whole' – in what ways can they be understood as a postmodern reaction / creation of capitalist spirituality? Are there comparatives to 'Seeing Things Whole' within non-Western contexts? Can a religion be a brand? Can a brand be a religion? What role does postmodernity play in the approach of faith / spirituality / religion as a marketable commodity or a means of selling another commodity?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

## **Tuesday 16.2 – crosses**

Using the image of the cross to explore the history of religion. The role of artefacts in a range of religious traditions, rituals and practices. The co-modification of the cross as a means of selling 'spirituality', especially within popular culture. The importance of the sense of sight in engaging with religion as a category and as a means of studying 'religion'.

S. Brent Plate, *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014) p137 - 174

## **21.2 – 25.2 – Mid Semester break, no classes**

### **Monday 29.2 – Public religion 4 – popular culture as / alternative to religion**

The postmodern rupture of the certainty of the centrality of popular culture and everyday life. The interaction between religion, popular culture and postmodernity as carving a new space for social change and transformation through the disintegration of boundaries. Religion AS popular culture and popular culture AS religion – case studies. Stuart Hall, Dick Hebdige, Christopher Partridge, Gordon Lynch and Tom Beaudoin. New spaces for understanding religion – critical religion, implicit religion.

#### *Required readings:*

Francis Stewart, "The Orange Order: A Religious Institution or an Expression of Implicit Religious Spinning?" Journal of Implicit Religion, Vol 18 No 2 2015 pp177 – 207

Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West Volume 1*, (London: T&T Clark, 2004) p38 - 59

#### *Recommended readings:*

Ibrahim Abraham & Francis Stewart, "Desacralizing Salvation in Straight Edge Christianity and Holistic Spirituality" International Journal for the Study of New Religions, Volume 5.1 2014, pp 77 – 102.

John Wolffe (ed) *Irish Religious Conflict in Comparative Perspective*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2014) chapter 4 Francis Stewart "Alternative Ulster: Punk Rock as a means of overcoming the religious divide in Northern Ireland." P 76 – 92

Christopher Partridge, *The Re-Enchantment of the West Volume 1*, (London: T&T Clark, 2004) p119 – 142

Student presentation – public religion 3: popular culture and religion

Provide a summary of the Klassen and the Forbes & Mahan readings. Draw out key points and discussion questions from the readings. Do you think it is possible (as Klassen asserts) to define popular culture without the use of value (implicit or explicit)? How can the section of religion and popular culture in dialogue be used in the consideration of the category of religion? How convinced are you by the reading of Star Trek in Forbes & Mahan? What other readings are possible? Can these types of readings be a helpful way of moving outside of a western world view?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Tuesday 1.3 – bread**

Using bread / food to explore the history of religion. The role of bread / food in a range of religious traditions, rituals and practices. The role of food in exploring religion from a post-colonial, globalised perspective. The importance of the sense of taste in engaging with religion as a category and as a means of studying 'religion'.

S. Brent Plate, *A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects*, (Boston: Beacon Press, 2014) p175 - 213

### **Monday 7.3 – Alternative theologies 1 – liberation and post-colonial theology**

The assumptions that postmodernism challenges and questions and the potential it raises / raised for new kinds of theology. Liberation theology as a result of postmodern theological concerns. The use of Marxism within liberation theology. Challenges within liberation theology (metanarratives, teleological utopia, modernist rhetoric) and responses to them. Attempts to articulate liberty through postcolonial readings of religion. Self-reflexivity as postmodern articulation of post-colonial thinking about religion, significance of performativity and the danger of relativism within the desire for the raising of unheard voices.

#### *Required readings:*

Marcella Althaus – Reid, *Liberation, Theology and Sexuality*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2006) Chapter 2, 'Once Again Liberating Theology?'

Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths & Helen Tiffin, *Post-Colonial Studies Reader*, (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 1994) p7 – 11, 24 – 28, 36 - 44

#### *Recommended readings:*

Chin Ce & Charles Smith, *Post-Colonial Identities*, (Nigeria: Handel Books, 2014) p163 – 183

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, (New York: Routledge, 1990)

Robert McAfee – Brown, *Liberation Theology: an introductory guide*, (Westminster: John Knox Press, 1993)

Paul E. Sigmund, *Liberation Theology at the Crossroads: democracy or revolution?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990) Chapter 10: 'After 20 years: liberation theology today'

Student presentation – public religion 4 – popular culture as / alternative to religion

Provide a summary of the Stewart and Partridge readings. Draw out key points and discussion questions from them both. How convinced are you by Stewart's use of Implicit Religion as an analytical tool to understand popular / cultural contexts that are behaving as 'religion'? Present other examples where such an approach might help to highlight the changing role of popular culture and religion in a postmodern society. Are you convinced by Partridge's argument that the West lost and is desperately trying to regain its sense of enchantment? How is religion connected with enchantment? Do you agree with Partridge that enchantment is best located within popular culture?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Tuesday 8.3** – student presentation – sight

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Monday 14.3** – Alternative theologies 2 – feminist and queer theology

A (very) brief history of the interaction between feminism and theology / religion in the West. Feminism outside of theology and outside of the West. Postmodern contentions of feminism and the development of postmodern feminism. Importance of Judith Butler to the structure of postmodern feminism. The need for a queer theology. Queer theology as potentially a new postmodern liberation theology. Significance of Michel Foucault and the development of his ideas by Judith Butler.

#### *Required readings:*

Margaret D. Kamitsuka, *Feminist Theology and the Challenge of Difference*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) Chapter 2 'Critical Issues in Retrieving Women's Experiences.'

Susannah Cornwall, *Controversies in Queer Theologies*, (London: SCM Press, 2011) Chapter 1 'What is Queer?'

#### *Recommended readings:*

Margaret D. Kamitsuka, *Feminist Theology and the Challenge of Difference*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) Chapter 4 'Theorizing Power'

Lisa Isherwood & Kathleen McPhillips, *Post-Christian Feminisms: A Critical Approach*, (Farnham: Ashgate, 2008) p25 -38

Anne-Emmanuelle Berger, *The Queer Turn in Feminism*, Catherine Porter (trans), (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014)

Kathleen T. Talvacchia & Michael F. Pettinger, *Queer Christianities: lived religion in transgressive forms*, (New York: New York University Press, 2014)

### Student presentation – Alternative theologies, liberation and post-colonial

Provide a summary of the Althaus and the Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin readings. Draw out key points and discussion questions from them. What did you learn about LALT and what lessons do you think can be taken from them today? How convinced are you by Althaus' assertion that liberation theology actually encourages the forging of new categories of 'otherness' and additional new forms of



oppression using old techniques and languages? What problems exist within the postcolonial framework? Can the subaltern speak or does the issues surrounding methodologies and postmodern understanding of communication continue to prevent her?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday 15.3** – student presentation – sound

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Monday 21.3** – Vision of an alternative society – capitalism ‘rejection’, spirituality of nature / body / place

Fredrich Jameson “The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism”, what comes after capitalism? Is the Occupy protests, Anonymous etc a postmodern rejection of capitalism and are they turning to religion / theology to find their answers / solutions / questions or new paths? The turn to a new spirituality that focuses on nature / body /place and is grounded upon the postmodern rejection of metanarratives and utopia. The role of Gen X in this new spirituality. Neo-paganism and the role of previous themes (worldviews, orientalism, commodification and fragmentation).

*Required readings:*

Paul Heelas & Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution*, (Malden: Blackwell, 2005) p1 – 32

Gordon Lynch, *The New Spirituality: an introduction to progressive belief in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*, (London: I. B. Tauris, 2007) Chapter 4 ‘Progressive Spirituality and Modern Religion in the West’

*Recommended readings:*

Robert C Fuller, *Spirituality in the Flesh: bodily sources of religious experience*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) Chapter 7 ‘Spirituality In /Of The Flesh’

Alfredo Saad-Filho, *Anti-Capitalism: A Marxist Introduction*, (London: Pluto Press, 2013) Part 3 ‘Crisis and the Supercession of Capitalism’

Student presentation – alternative theologies 2: feminist and queer theologies

Provide a summary of the Kamitsuko and the Cornwall readings. Draw out key points and discussion questions from them. How convinced are you by how oppressive Christian symbols (the cross and the maleness of Jesus as the Christ) might be deployed as what Foucault calls technologies for the care of the self in Kamitsuko? How helpful is post-structural theory in engaging with issues surrounding feminism (and indeed queerness)? To what extent do you think queer theory, as outlined by Cornwall, succeeds in resisting and interrogating heteronormativity in theological terms? How convinced are you by the definition of ‘queer’ proposed by Cornwall?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday 22.3** – student presentation – smell

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Friday 25.3 – deadline for emailing proposed essay question and signing up for personal meeting**

**Monday 28.3 – Easter Monday, no classes, university closed**

**Tuesday 29.3 – Student presentation – touch**

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

**29.3 – 1.4 – personal meetings with course convenor**

**Monday 4.4 – Human condition, postmodernity and the postmodern god**

The propensity within postmodernity to reduce the human, or what it means to be human, to market terms and interests and reactions to it. A shifting from functionality within religion to functionality within the marketplace? The question of identity within postmodernity and the loss of 'I' (Baudrillard) and the implications for understanding religion and those who construct identity around it, especially within the Protestant understanding of a relationship with God. Graham Ward 'The Postmodern God' as an attempt to find a way through liberalism and nihilism. An understanding of a postmodern concept of God as a new form of radical hermeneutics.

*Required readings:*

Noelle Vahanian, *The Rebellious No: variations on a secular theology of language*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2014) Chapter 8 'Counter Currents'

Clayton Crockett, *Religion, Politics and the Earth: the new materialism*, (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2012) Chapter 2 'Religion' p17 -36

*Recommended readings:*

Christina M. Gschwandtner, *Postmodern Apologetics? Arguments for God in Contemporary Philosophy*, (New York: Fordham University Press, 2012) Chapter 10

George Pattison, *God and Being: An Enquiry*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) Introduction

Graham Ward, *Postmodern God: Theological Reader*, (London: Blackwell, 1997) p235 – 248

Student presentation – Alternative society – rejection of capitalism, spirituality of nature / body / place

Provide a summary of Heelas & Woodhead and the Lynch readings. Draw out key points and discussion questions from both. How convinced are you by Heelas & Woodhead's findings (and assertion) that religion is giving way to spirituality? How postmodern is the type of spirituality that they are proposing? What criticisms would you raise of Heelas and Woodhead's thesis? How convinced are you by Lynch's criteria? In what ways do the categories studied in this course impact upon Lynch's thesis? What criticisms would you raise of Lynch's thesis?

Students presenting: \_\_\_\_\_

**Tuesday 5.4 – Can you keep a secret? Well so can I. ☺ Surprise finale.**

**Friday 22.4 – Final essay due by 5pm**