McGill-CREOR Graduate Students’ Conference ‘14
March 21st & 22nd, 2014
McGill University, Montreal

PERCEIVING RELIGION:
The Production, Consumption, and Reception
of Religious Imagery

FRIDAY

Plenary Lecture: 17h30

“Images and the Modernity of Religion”

Kajri Jain
Associate Professor
of Indian Visual Culture and Contemporary Art,
University of Toronto

Wine Reception: 19h30

SATURDAY

Panel Discussions: 09h00–16h55
BIography

Kajri Jain is Associate Professor of Indian Visual Culture and Contemporary Art in the Department of Visual Studies and the Graduate Departments of Art History and Cinema Studies at the University of Toronto. Initially trained in Visual Communication at the National Institute of Design in Ahmedabad, India, Jain has a PhD in Art History from the University of Sydney, has held postdoctoral fellowships with the Australian Research Council and the Getty Research Institute, and has worked in departments of art history, cultural studies, film studies and anthropology in Australia, the US and Canada. Her research on popular images in India focuses on the interface between religion, visual culture and vernacular business cultures; she also writes on contemporary art. She is the author of Gods in the Bazaar: the Economies of Indian Calendar Art (Duke University Press, 2007), and is currently working on a book on the emergence of monumental iconic sculptures in post-liberalization India.
ABSTRACT

Images connected with religion have always had a hard time. Variously denigrated as idolatrous, regressive, offensive, fetishistic, and kitsch, in our ‘secular age’ images in their material presence are the battlefields of modernity’s attempts to contain iconopraxis: the separation of church and state that relegates religion to an interiorized spirituality or a privatized realm of kin and community; the antinomy between matter and spirit and hence between commerce and the sacred; and the sublimation of religion into the aesthetic, that polarizes cult value and exhibition value. Drawing on my work on a very recent genre of monumental Indian icons, I want to suggest that rather than having to choose between the ‘homogeneous, empty’ linear time of secular modernism and heterogeneous non-secular temporalities, ‘perceiving religion’ is better served by recognizing the productive turbulence at the interface of these temporalities. A function of uneven development, this turbulence—which I call the hetero-modern—exists everywhere, illuminating the anachronistic historicity and untimely contemporaneity of both religion and the image.

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MODERN HINDUISM I:
COLONIALISM AND NATIONALISM
IN INDIA AND ABROAD

09h00–09h25

“Gender and Nation in ACK Comics.”
Stephanie Duclos-King, McGill University

Amar Chitra Katha (ACK), or “Immortal Picture Stories”, are an Indian series of comic books in which the heroes are Hindu gods and goddesses. Each ACK comic begins with a call back to the “Golden Age” of Hinduism, a pre-colonial idealization that Orientalists created and perpetuated. In the case of women, the ideals espoused are the pativrata, the chaste wife, and the virangana, a woman who manifests qualities of male heroism. ACK comics created a utopian vision of an idealized nation with idealized portraits of women. The utopia rests on not only presenting an idea of a perfect future, in the case of Indian nationalism, it is more of a call to the perfect, imagined past that would constitute the present. These echoes of the past are deployed to create and maintain an image of the ideal Hindu nation, one that is synonymous with middle class notions of respectability and authenticity. Through the use of two popular ACK issues, “Tales of Mother Durga” and “Kannagi”, this essay investigates the impulse to create a comic that solidifies the pan-Indian conceptualization of a Hindu pantheon and the ways in which this impulse has resonated with the consumers. I argue here that the comics, as a form of children’s literature, are a unique method of reifying a middle class Hindu Indian identity through the perpetuation of “traditional” gender roles and the utopian “Hindu” nation.

09h25–09h50

“The Abject Mother and Devotees:
The Disidentifications of Kali-Mai in Guyana and Trinidad.”
Rajanie Kumar, York University

This paper examines the journey of Kali-Mai, the Hindu goddess associated with death and destruction, into the Caribbean during the indentureship period of 1838–1917. During the indentured period many of the migrants who left India to work on plantations in the Caribbean brought their religious and spiritual practices with them. The worship of Kali-Mai was placed in a stratified society between existing African religious beliefs, Christianity and Hinduism. As the indentureship period came to an end and various religious ideologies competed for authenticity, the worship of Kali-Mai was stigmatized and marginalized because of her dark appearance and sacrificial rituals that were associated with her. Those who worship Kali are positioned in the realm of abject, geographically
and symbolically ‘othered’, though worship devoutly regardless of the stigmatizations placed upon them. This paper argues that Kali-Mai and her rituals can be theorized through the analytic category of “disidentifications” as proposed by Jose Esteban Munoz (1999). According to Munoz, “disidentifications” as a theoretical framework seek to understand what strategies minority subjects engage with to negotiate the dominant culture. Specifically, this paper analyzes the psychic processes of mourning and melancholia as acts of “disidentifications” within Kali-Mai traditions to show how individuals who participate in Kali worship are reconstructing their identities and engaging with activism. The theoretical framework of “disidentifications” offers a (re)-envisioning of Kali-Mai, her practices and devotees. It forces one to re-conceptualize the Goddess of death, as giving life back to devotees.

09h50–10h15

“Mardévirin’s dress-up: Creole Religion and its Hybrid Images.”
Marek Ahnee, McGill University

The paper will focus on the rituals and discourses around Mardévirin, a figure associated with the Tamil communities of Mauritius and Réunion Islands. He finds his original identity in Madurai Veeran, a fierce warrior deity of South India known and revered for his shapeshifting and mutant powers. Perceived as a god, demigod or demon, Mardévirin is a subject of permanent (re)imagination, going along with an imagery as plural and protean as the deity himself. Looking at the shrines and legends of Mardévirin, I will explore in detail the mechanics of this religious imagination in the Colonial insular context, where vernacularization produced many hybrid local images of Tamil gods. From mental to material, these images are heavily inflected by Catholic iconography and Creole “folklore.” Hindu paladin, Roman centurion or colonial officer, Mardévirin’s image crossed communal imaginaries and was permanently reshaped by them. Pictured and enshrined, this image is always the centre of a creatively vernacular ritual life mirroring the visual collage. Analyzing the poetics and politics of this imagery, I will argue that the Post-colonial order and its rectilinear imagination attempted to remove the ambiguous Mardévirin from religious normativity, often through literal iconoclasm. Opening on a prospective fieldwork research, I will question the role of “visualization” in a cult endangered by ideological and material erasure. Going beyond the notions of “syncretism” or “colonial religion”, the paper hope to address the fluidity at work in ritual bricolage and religious imagination.

10h15–10h30

Questions and Discussion
PROPAGANDA AND MEMORY IN LATE ANTIQUITY

09h00–09h25

“The David Plates and Old Testament Imperial Imagery in Early Byzantium.”
Lucas McMahon, University of Ottawa

The David Plates are a set of nine Byzantine silver plates dating from the reign of the emperor Herakleios (610–641 A.D.) which depict a series of images from the life of the Biblical King David. The traditional readings of the plates, based largely upon a series of articles from the 1970s, placed them within the context of the imperial and religious propaganda used by the regime of Herakleios and assumed they were produced for that purpose. In a 2000 article which was followed up by the 2004 monograph Silver and Society in Late Antiquity, Ruth Leader-Newby cogently argued that the plates should be seen in the context of late antique tableware rather than as pieces of imperial and religious propaganda. While Leader-Newby’s work was highly effective in exposing assumptions made haphazardly by earlier scholarship on the plates, a fault still lies in removing the plates too far from their religious and imperial context. This paper seeks to argue that the plates fit too well into the propaganda of the early seventh century to be entirely separate from it. The plates may not have been imperially commissioned or liturgically used, but they fit into an atmosphere that sought to evoke images of Old Testament rulers and Byzantine emperors while using classical art forms. Despite the probable private production and consumption of the plates, an atmosphere of religious imagery that stressed connections to the Byzantine state make it reasonable to argue that the images were received in a matter befitting imperial propaganda.

09h25–09h50

“Image Control: Constructing Perfect Martyrs.”
Heather Barkman, University of Ottawa

In the first three centuries of the Common Era, Christians were the targets of sporadic yet violent persecutions. During these persecutions, some Christians suffered and died for their faith and these martyrs quickly became important tools in the construction of what it meant to be an ideal Christian. However, as martyrs were only human, not all lived up to an ideal image. Although the ideal is most often the focus of both ancient Christian authors and modern scholars, occasional glimpses of imperfect martyrs can be discerned in ancient writings. The fact that some martyrs conducted themselves in imperfect ways could not be ignored but instead had to be reconfigured. Thus, North African writers such as Tertullian, Cyprian, and Augustine all engaged in “image control”, justifying and reshaping imperfect behaviour to fit within an idealized image of the martyr.
This presentation will examine the strategies that these authors used to reconfigure imperfection into an image that was useful in creating a particular kind of Christian identity. This will help to create a more nuanced understanding of the ways in which the ideal of the martyr changed depending on factors such as temporal context and the genre of the text. Ultimately, I will demonstrate that with the proper reframing, imperfect martyr images could be made to be just as rhetorically useful as idealized ones.

“Visualizing the Dead: How Funerary Images Evoke Memory and Identity.”
Nicola Hayward, McGill University

In antiquity the omnipresence of death made it a cultural immediacy and as a result an integral aspect of the Roman experience. Christians too shared in Roman burial and ritual customs, and were often buried alongside Romans in catacombs. It is in death that a person's social position and identity were encoded through last rites and commemorative images. Funerary art, therefore, has its roots in the living world and can provide evidence for the beliefs and values of that world. In consideration that death occupied a prominent space in the lives of the living, it is no wonder then that memorials of the dead also occupied a prominent space in Roman art. Since one of the functions of funerary art is to articulate the social status, beliefs, identity and values of the deceased it raises many questions as to how individuals or communities used art to express such complex social structures such as: How does funerary art function in evoking the memory of the deceased? How does it promote identity? In the Roman world was the desire to be remembered as having lived a successful life. In order to accomplish this effect, the deceased or their families would commission artwork that underscored their achievements. Remembering the dead required the living visit the graves to make offerings and to share a meal during the annual festivals. During these visits the frescoes that decorated the catacomb walls were viewed by family, which had the effect of promoting the deceased's memory and identity.

Questions and Discussion
MODERN HINDUISM II: CINEMA, SPECTACLE, AND IMAGINING TRADITION

10h50–11h15

“Projecting Piety: The Construction of Middle class Religious Identity in Tamil Amman Films.”
Lisa Blake, McGill University

Tamil “amman”, or “mother goddess”, films are a unique genre that developed in the mid-1970s and gained a modicum of popularity by the 1980s. For some viewers, they serve as a filmic iteration of their own realities, while for others they represent and reinforce the possibility of social mobilization. As a social phenomenon in India, the middle class accelerated in an unprecedented way in the 1980s, mainly as a result of the liberalization of India’s economy. While the socio-economic ramifications of a new middle class can be quite obvious—for example, the importance placed on material goods as a marker of higher status—the need for change in religious practice is far more complex. As such, it becomes necessary to forge a new approach to religion that can ultimately be termed as “middle class” religion. This dichotomy is shown throughout Tamil amman films, where the traditional, lower-class devotee is shown in contrast to her modern, middle class counterpart. The message throughout the films is clear—that although one should strive to be middle class, there is a danger in moving too far from traditional religious attitudes. Therefore, in this paper, I will argue that the imagery of amman films both informs and reifies middle class attitudes towards Hinduism in south India. I will begin by focusing on the context from which amman films developed, before delving more deeply into the filmed images of the middle class family, the lower-class devotee, and the rituals of the village temple.

11h15–11h40

“The Birth of a Mega-Spectacle: Theme Park Temples in 21st Century India.”
Swetha Vijayakumar, University of California, Berkeley

Animatronics, IMAX theaters, and themed gardens are aspects that characterize several successful modern Indian temples. As sacred spaces turn into ‘spectacles’ through an uninhibited adoption of entertainment technology and an unmistakable touch of Disney, a new kind of experience economy and a new age of religious architecture have arrived. Contemporary architects and “imagineers” of Hindu sacred spaces, commissioned to captivate members of a young, increasingly affluent, modernizing Indian society, resort to a hybridization of traditional temple form
and typology, integrating seamlessly with high-tech western elements. The resultant spectacles are innovative “Theme Park Temples” that invoke tradition but imitate modernity. The Akshardham Temple complexes at New Delhi and Gujarat, and ISKON’s upcoming Krishna Leela Theme Park in Bangalore mark a new dawn in Indian temple architecture. While Akshardham museumizes nationalist ideologies, purging layers of cultural identity and cleansing Indian history of its non-Hindu imageries to portray a ‘golden age of Hinduism’, ISKCON’s temples push the established boundaries of cultural realm, experimenting with avant-garde religious reforms. As Hindu pilgrimage centers espouse a new architectural identity, religious theme parks raise the architectural ante as tools of ideological propaganda and enfranchisement among young prosperous sects, and transform religious experience. What ideals and values do the new breed of Hindu showcase temples and their entertainment spectacles advance, and just how India’s infatuation with the theme park temple will transform the fundamental experience of Hindu faith, while still is a matter of speculation, constitutes a question at the core of this paper.

11h40–12h05

“India on Screen: Heritage and the Body in Visual Anthropology.”
Henria Aton, McGill University

From the first colonial films to scholarly documentaries, the medium of visual anthropology has been instrumental in representing and evoking particular images of Indianness. Significantly, these films diverge from the depiction of India through materiality, such as its ancient texts, arts, and architecture. By revolving around the Indian subject and his/her body, they play a critical role in portraying India’s heritage as living and embodied, rather than material. Following Brenda Farnell’s analysis of the three major academic discourses around the body in anthropology (2011), the representation of native bodies in these films, which span 80 years, reflects the progressing views on the ‘body’ from a cultural object to an active producer of meaning. The power of the film medium as a form of knowledge is illustrated in the way these various films use the subject’s body as the key to representing India. In this paper, I will argue that anthropological-type films construct India’s heritage as a corporeal and aesthetic experience that is mapped onto the bodies of their subjects, the Indian people. I will begin by examining the 1934 British colonial film *The Song of Ceylon*, followed by an analysis of the Indian Government Films Division’s *Land of Krishna*. Next, I will explore modern representations of heritage and subjecthood in the 2010 ethnographic film *The Poojari’s Daughter*, and Rakesh Sharma’s 2001 documentary, *Final Solution*. The variety of my case studies demonstrates the wider relevance of this argument for visual anthropology and ethnographic films, which continue to be a point of contention in academic discourse.

12h05–12h25

Questions and Discussion
MODERN CHRISTIANITY I: COMMODIFYING AND MEDIATING VISUAL TECHNOLOGY

10h50–11h15

“The Mediated Relic: Produced Belief and the Shroud of Turin.”
Tamira Beth Stephens, Harvard University

The Shroud of Turin, a relic owned by the Roman Catholic Church purported to be the burial cloth of Jesus Christ and bearing the image of a crucified man, can be understood as a produced item of religious significance through its portrayal by specific and intentional media representations. Belief in and about the Shroud has relied upon its dissemination through visual and print media since its earliest photograph resulting and negative, culminating in both a website and an iPhone application that allow the user to digitally “interact” with the relic by utilizing specific technologies. This paper argues that belief in the Shroud as an authentic religious relic has been contingent upon its mediation and subsequent consumption, and as there is no way to completely divorce the relic from its production, as the Shroud is produced, it is either accepted or rejected as authentic. This project entails a close and considered analysis of the discourse surrounding the Shroud of Turin by referencing Marshall McLuhan’s The Medium is the Massage, in order to understand how belief can directly correspond to an item’s mediation and consumption, the relationship specific media technologies have on the item, and how created discourse can act as the medium for belief in this holy relic.

11h15–11h40

“Memorial Lithographs as Commodities, Artworks, and Relics in Nineteenth-Century American Protestantism.”
Jamie L. Brummitt, Duke University

From the 1830s to 1880s, lithographers produced memorial lithographs in the United States. These lithographs depicted stylized and anonymous mourners, monuments, and Protestant churches. This paper examines the visual history of memorial lithographs, their production as commodities, and their consumption and reception among nineteenth-century Americans. It argues that the power of memorial lithographs emerged in their transformation from history-less commodities to religious artworks and relics with auras. Memorial lithographs were imitative of “mourning pieces,” a genre of schoolgirl needlework, popular from the 1790s to 1830s. These needlework pictures depicted stylized, but highly personalized images of mourning families. In the 1840s, lithographers sold
copies of mourning pieces as lithographs. These lithographs were commodities in that they were mass-produced objects with biographies of production and consumption that cannot be fully recovered. This “historylessness” and visual anonymity contributed to the lithographs’ widespread appeal as Protestants of all denominations, ages, and genders could purchase the prints. Yet, this anonymity provided the vacuum that attracted agency to memorial lithographs. Protestants personalized these images with epitaphs and displayed them in parlors. As displayed artworks, memorial lithographs exuded a bourgeoisie aura that elevated the perceived social status of mourning families. Memorial lithographs also acted as relics that linked mourners to the dead. They functioned as non-corporeal remains that embodied memories of the deceased and their consciousness through the epitaphs. The epitaphs contributed biographies to memorial lithographs and displaced their anonymity. Memorial lithographs escaped their commodity status as they served as material manifestations of social capital and memories.

11h40–12h05


The confluence of national identity creation and religious structures of belief and morality went through a particularly dramatic period of evolution in the nineteenth century, due in large part to shifts in educational theory, policy, and practice. As I will demonstrate in this paper, the biblical imagery of French artist Gustave Doré (1832–1883) played a significant role in the debates surrounding the Bible and its use as a pedagogical tool, in public education and religious formation. From children’s literature to fiery sermons, from prayer cards to magic lantern slides, Doré’s biblical imagery became a key part of the visual language through which the debates surrounding the changing role of the Bible in America were expressed.

Doré’s Bible illustrations were a consistent and pervasive part of these educational materials, appearing in illustrated Bibles, narratives of the life of Christ, commentaries and sermons from well-known preachers and scholars, and especially children’s literature. In 1892 the Doré Gallery, which had attracted two-and-a-half million visitors since it opened in London in 1869, was sent to the United States and would ultimately be shown in a variety of locations. When on view at the Art Institute of Chicago in 1896, the Reverend Dr. P. H. Swift, said, “If you do not like to have the soul stirred to its deepest depths, do not go to the Doré Gallery.” By examining the forms, history, and persuasive power of Doré’s biblical work, we are able to better understand the ways in which images are constitutive in the production of belief.

12h05–12h25

Questions and Discussion
CHRISTIAN IMAGES IN WESTERN PICTORIAL NARRATIVES

10h50–11h15

“Envisioning Sacredness:
The Rise of Pictorial Narrative in the Cult of St. Ursula.”
Andrew R. Sears, University of California, Berkeley

Around 1500, Saint Ursula was Europe’s—and perhaps even the world’s—chief patron and most holy heroine. She was traditionally venerated for her promotion of pious martyrdom, having led eleven thousand virgin comrades to their deaths outside of Cologne, though by the late fifteenth century there was an increasing interest in her journey that led up to her martyrdom. Images of her grew from single panel paintings into elaborate narrative cycles that envisioned every detail of her travels and adorned entire rooms. She became the patron saint of ships, and newly discovered lands were christened in her honor. This dual growth, cultic and pictorial, aligns in many ways with the growth of the travel literature genre, though it also seems to be the result of the ways in which discourses around sanctity and the rhetoric of narration dovetailed in this moment. Sainthood and relics were becoming increasingly multivalent, simultaneously mystical and mundane, and narrative similarly was seen to both point outside of itself and inwards towards its own armature. Pictorial narratives of Ursula, then, seem to both promote Ursula as magnificent, as well as merely artistically curated; venerators could simultaneously see sacredness and its artifice.

11h15–11h40

“Pop-alyptic: Revelation, Watchmen, Kingdom Come.”
Aaron Ricker, McGill University

“I know it’s nice to find beginnings and ends.” — Jay Reatard

“Apocalyptic” is a controversial category in the field of Religious Studies, but the label is reliably associated with otherworldly revelations and end time speculation. This presentation will compare 3 “apocalyptic bestsellers” with significant family resemblances: the biblical book of Revelation, Alan Moore’s Watchmen (1987), and Ross/Waid’s Kingdom Come (1996), in order to build an argument that a certain constellation of oddities they share points to their family branch of the apocalyptic medium as a message. I will show that one significant strand of cultural-creative DNA that drives and ties them together is a shared group of creative characteristics often thought of in conjunction with Pop Art—i.e. irony, nostalgia, ambivalence about visual image communication, and a creative obsession with their own status within economies of technology and production, especially with regard to mass
culture and mass production. The focus throughout will, of course, be on the use and perception of “religious” cultural materials and meanings. The investigative payoff of this triangulated apocalyptic tour of comparison will be a summary review of how the medium is the message when New Ages and Ends of Ages evolve by creatively cannibalizing Golden Ages past, within environments of popular culture and mass textual production: in the final analysis, these means of articulating apocalyptic imagination are rhetorically inseparable from the intelligibility of the culturally convenient and culturally contingent “beginnings and ends” they seem to have evolved to provide.

**11h40–12h05**


Christina Pasqua, *Carleton University*

In response to the secularization thesis, various scholars have argued that religiosity and spirituality continue to exist in the contemporary world, but they must be examined through alternative means of expression. This requires an analysis of art, or visual culture, and acknowledging the social, political, and economic factors that influence or reshape our conception of religion over time. This paper will examine the material dimension of American religious life through the graphic novelization of the Bible. This medium synthesizes the interpretation and reception history of religious texts with contemporary graphic art to create a cultural product that blurs the line between religion and consumerism. My examination of the graphic novel will demonstrate how various American subcultures synthesize and, as a result, remain relevant by creating an audience, readership, and public of their own. This provides the opportunity to analyze contemporary religious expression and its criticisms outside of their traditional forms. My analysis of the graphic novel ultimately demonstrates that religious expression, as well as the traditions it is rooted in, do not remain static, but transform and respond to consumer culture. As a result, there is a fusion or a collapse of the dichotomy between spirituality and materiality, the sacred and the profane, or elite and low culture, because each realm is no longer regarded as categorically distinct from the other, but rather internally related. Thus, cultural items that are bought and sold on a mass-scale are not mere products, but crucial elements in the social construction of reality and contemporary religious experience.

**12h05–12h25**

Questions and Discussion
Visual arts have historically been closely related to Christian theology. They have both worked together to convey important theological messages. Take, for example, Baroque art, which communicated the ideas brought about by the Council of Trent. Visual arts have also given a voice to marginalized communities. For example, the works of Caravaggio are an expression, a celebration even, of male same-sex desire. Contemporary art is not an exception, as it is still influenced by Christianity and it continues to be used by queer people as a means of communicating concerns with HIV/AIDS, identity, and equality. This paper explores the relationship between contemporary art and queer theology to articulate the ways in which two queer photographers appropriate Christian tradition and make it accessible for non-heterosexual individuals. I begin the paper with a discussion of queer theology, which suggests that the Christian tradition offers a rich set of possibilities for thinking about same-sex desire. I then turn my attention to examples from contemporary photography: the works by Swedish photographer Elisabeth Ohlson Wallin, who recreates scenes from the New Testament and uses queer individuals as her subjects. I focus particularly on her works titled *Supper*, *Lamentation*, and *Annunciation*. Similarly, the work of English photographer Anthony Gayton appropriates Christian images and amplifies their homoeroticism in exhibitions such as *The Martyrs*, *Renaissance Man*, and *Sinners & Saints*. By including queer subjects in scenes that have been understood in heterosexist terms, these photographers make queer theology a tangible reality.

This paper examines how current video games deploy haptic visuality and what increased “hapticity” might look like. Using Laura U. Marks’ and Sara Ahmed’s theories of affect to reveal new modes of political visibility through vision-touch, this paper will argue that learning haptically in gaming is a mode of transcendence, a movement through and beyond material bodies and subjects. Hapticity pushes at the boundaries of optic sensibilities by blurring, thinning and abstracting images; demanding thought beyond sight. This wider sensorium forces the construction of meaningful images out of sense memories. Corporeal visuality reconfigures subjectivities; re-
orienting viewers to engage images inter-subjectively, erotically, and empathetically. Tactile means of learning directed by the procedural rhetoric of video gaming through a field of haptic images creates a mimetic, indexical, and affective inter-subjective transcendence between the body of the screen and the body of the self. Seeing and producing games haptically brings corporeality back into games by forcing players to feel differently (at the edge of sensory perception) about relationships between the bodies in (and of) the game. These transcendent relations between self, game, and image supply religion scholars with a way of thinking about gaming as a negotiation of inter-subjective and inter-corporeal images of affective meaning, with consequences for how body, self, image, game, and play are conceived within frames of religiosity and meaning-making.

14h25–14h50

“Looking for the Mikvah Attendant on YouTube: Disembodiment, Absence, and Emotion.”
Maria Juntila Carson, Syracuse University

This paper critically examines four educational YouTube videos regarding the Jewish practice of ritual immersion in a mikvah. I argue that these films frame the mikvah attendant as separated physically and thematically from the ritual of mikvah immersion itself. By looking at the deployment of affect throughout these films, I conclude that this is done deliberately to frame mikvah immersion as an intensely personal, private, and individually fulfilling spiritual experience: the ritual is presented as an event that is either not observed or barely observed by a mikvah attendant. These four videos present a homogenous kind of mikvah experience not only to promote particular attitudes and expectations about the practice of mikvah immersion. I also argue that these videos attempt to construct a particular kind of Jewish subject: a Jewish self who experiences only certain emotions during the ritual of immersion in a mikvah. By doing so, this paper addresses how the production and reception of this particular ritual has the power to not only create and promote a new understanding and expectation of that ritual, but also to change expectations of how a subject ought to respond to particular rituals. I use Goody’s understanding of how power and the act of writing about and/or describing a ritual coalesce together to ultimately transform what is seen as significant to a particular ritual practice. I use Saba Mahmood’s articulations of how affect can be deployed to construct a network of subjectivity, power, and subject-construction as a theoretical framework.

14h50–15h05

Questions and Discussion
"A Life of Its Own: A New Materialist’s Look at Religious Imagery."
Sonia Hazard, Duke University

The study of religion remains delimited by its anthropocentric methods. Scholars tend to ask only certain questions of religion, questions whose contours are the thinking, practicing, and feeling human being. This privileging of the human remains undisputed even in studies of religious visual culture, which continue to be dominated by symbolic and phenomenological methods: the first mines images for meanings (for humans), while the second limits its inquiries to the human body’s sensations, perceptions, and uses of images. Nonhuman material things—such as the image itself, its materials and modes of production, and its forms of dissemination—struggle to come into sharp focus. This paper makes an argument for a model of understanding religious visual culture as comprised of intermixed hybrids, or “assemblages” of both human and nonhuman agents. Drawing on “new materialist” theory, the paper shows how humans and nonhumans are fundamentally entangled and co-constitutive. Nonhuman material things, then, are revealed to be religious agents, as humans are. Methodologically, the religious image is best understood as a player in a larger assemblage of vital agencies. These claims are advanced on the basis of a case from the author’s subfield of American religion. As the Protestant publisher the American Tract Society became a dominant force in American society in the 1820s, its success must be seen as partially attributable to nonhuman agents such as the printing press, stereotyped plates, boxwood blocks, and canals. These various materialities assembled with Protestant bodies and imaginations in novel and unpredictable ways that are irreducible to human intention, use, or meaning.

"Uncovering a New History of the Lactating Virgin in Catholic Visual Rhetoric."
Hannah Ryan, Cornell University

While often shocking to contemporary viewers, paintings of the Virgin Mary breastfeeding the infant Christ were once most common and served as a primary mode of conveying Mary’s humanity and Christ’s dual nature as both human and divine. The genre known as Maria Lactans was deemed inappropriate in the sixteenth century during the Council of Trent, and paintings were removed from official church spaces and breasts covered with paint. In spite of this mandate, the subject remained a favorite among painters and believers alike and continued to flourish...
in Catholic countries and colonies. This imagery remained largely absent from Catholic spaces until 2009, when
the Vatican, then under Pope Benedict, issued a formal call to re-hang them in churches and requested the artists
of the world, when rendering the Virgin and Child, to consider depicting the Virgin breastfeeding Christ. Most
recently, Pope Francis has made his support of breastfeeding well known, breaking new ground during a Papal
Baptism in the Sistine Chapel in January of this year when he encouraged mothers to nurse their infants during
the ceremony. It is at this pivotal moment in the church’s relationship with breastfeeding, and thus with women
and children, that a new history of Maria Lactans can be uncovered and written. This paper tracks the little known
history of the production and reception of an image which is poised to imminently become more familiar, and
raises questions about the physicality of belief, perceptions of breastfeeding and global health, how the Church
responds to societal change, and broadly, the importance of visual rhetoric in Catholicism.

14h25–14h50

“Religious Imagery in Costa Rican Pentecostal Worship and Daily Life.”
Jared Epp, University of Ottawa

In this paper I explore two sides of Pentecostal imagery; that which defines and facilitates a relationship to God
and that which expresses a relationship to “worldly”, daily existence. Based on ethnographic fieldwork conducted
in the spring of 2013 with Pentecostal Christians in Costa Rica, I show that these two imageries mutually con-
stitute and reinforce a particular religious identity. Pentecostal imagery expresses a relationship to God that is
intimate, embodied and comes to full expression during worship. Though Pentecostals cultivate a certain detach-
ment from the “world”, I argue that bodily engagement is crucial for the potency of their worship. Pentecostals
in Costa Rica practice their faith in a religious landscape steeped in Catholicism. They see themselves as liberated
from the need of intermediaries such as Priests, Saints, and the Virgin Mary to control and guide their spiritual
path. Through scripture, prayer, and worship, Pentecostals create a dialogue directly with God. I argue that in-
stead of removing the medium between themselves and the divine they use different means and replace one type
of religious imagery with another. Drawing from my own research and the literature on Pentecostalism and the
anthropology of religion, I present Pentecostal imagery as a window into religious identity as it is embodied inside
the church during worship and lived outside in daily life.

14h50–15h05

Questions and Discussion
13h35–14h00

“Reflecting Light and Beauty: Traversari’s use of Pseudo-Dionysian Theories of the Image in Interpreting Christian Piety.”
Rebecca Coughlin, McGill University

Ambrogio Traversari (1386–1439) was a monk and patristic scholar in early Renaissance Italy. He lived for 30 years in the Camaldolese monastery of Sta. Maria degli Angeli in Florence where he studied early Christian sources and taught himself Greek. Over the course of his career he would collect and translate the works of many of the Greek Fathers and classical pagan philosophers. He was also the first Renaissance humanist to produce a translation of Pseudo-Dionysian Corpus. Traversari’s journey to Ravenna in 1433 was the occasion for two lengthy discussions of art and architecture. This paper will identify specific examples from Traversari’s two texts describing the churches of Ravenna and Classe that point to the influence of Dionysian thought on his work. These examples come together to form a picture of Traversari’s position on the role of artifice in Christian piety. What role do art and architecture play in leading the Christian into a right relationship with God? What is the function of the image within Christian worship? What does its role and function say about the theological status of the image for Dionysius and for Traversari? The extent to which Traversari actually draws directly from Dionysius in these descriptions will be discussed as will his adherence to or deviation from Dionysian aesthetic principles.

14h00–14h25

Christina Moss, University of Waterloo

Ursula Jost, the wife of Strasbourg butcher Lienhard Jost, experienced a series of seventy-five visions from late 1524 to early 1530. In 1530, the Anabaptist lay preacher Melchior Hoffman published a record of the visions entitled Prophetic Visions and Revelations of the Divine Purpose in this Last of Times. These visions aroused the suspicion of Strasbourg’s reformers, but they received an enthusiastic response from Hoffman’s followers in the Netherlands. The collected visions of Ursula Jost—the longest extant piece of writing by sixteenth-century Anabaptist woman—provide a revealing glimpse into the ways in which one non-elite Christian woman on the mar-
gins of early modern European society interacted with and spoke about religious images. Ursula’s visions contain a myriad of images, ranging from common ones such as the cross, or God the Father, and the contrast of light/good and dark/evil, to images such as trees and wreaths, which she imbued with religious significance. In particular, Ursula’s visions contain a preponderance of apocalyptic imagery, which she linked to contemporary events such as the Peasants’ War, the imperial persecution of the Anabaptists, and the threat of an Ottoman incursion into the Holy Roman Empire. Her overarching religious worldview, in which God ruled the cosmos and dispensed justice, sustaining the poor and punishing their wealthy oppressors (whom she often identified with the clergy), coloured the religious images with which she most commonly identified, and the ways in which she interpreted them. Ursula’s visions provide a vivid sixteenth-century example of the subversive use of religious imagery in order to undermine the religious establishment.

14h25–14h50

“The Allegory of the Fall as the Foundation for Bacon’s Agnostic Theoretical Science.”
Orsolya Csaszar, Guelph University

Religious allegory is one way in which language is used to create religious imagery. The Allegory of the Fall, from the book of Genesis, is an example of religious imagery. Francis Bacon’s appeal to the Allegory of the Fall, in the New Organon (1620), is a powerful example of a philosopher of science appealing to religious imagery and producing a controversial agnostic interpretation of this religious imagery. On Bacon’s understanding, the Allegory of the Fall demonstrates that God did not design humans with the capabilities to apprehend moral knowledge. Rather, God designed humans with the capacities to identify and name all that which exists in the Garden of Eden. Bacon’s agnostic reading of the Allegory of the Fall informs him that the very possibility of moral knowledge is what he characterizes as an idol of the mind—a type of illusion that blocks the opportunity for human knowers to gain access to objective abstract truth. Bacon’s agnostic reading of The Allegory of the Fall provides a foundation for his controversial claim that moral concerns do not have a legitimate role to play with regards to constraining the development of theoretical scientific knowledge.

14h50–15h05

Questions and Discussion
CINEMA AND JUDEO-CHRISTIAN RELIGION

15h25–15h50

“Orthodox Symbolism in Soviet Film.”
Yevgeniya Kramchenkova, Carleton University

Sergei Eisenstein and Andrei Tarkovsky are perhaps the best known Soviet film directors in the liberal West. My essay will focus on one aspect of their complex, and often challenging, films: religious presence. The Soviet Union was often criticized for the repression and persecution of religion, especially the Orthodox Church. However, these prohibitions did not stop Eisenstein and Tarkovsky from using Orthodox symbolism in their films. I argue that Eisenstein and Tarkovsky, despite sharing the same cultural roots, had very different reasons behind their use of the religious symbolism. Eisenstein’s films are heavily influenced by Soviet ideology; while he was a self-proclaimed atheist and a supporter of the October Revolution, as a man who was raised in Russian culture he could not escape the influence that Orthodoxy had on him. Orthodoxy had become such an essential part of the Russian cultural memory that Eisenstein unconsciously uses well-known symbols to connect to his viewers. In contrast Andrei Tarkovsky was raised in a very Soviet household. Because the red ideology had been successful in pushing Orthodoxy out of people’s everyday life, Tarkovsky self-consciously presented the viewer with religious symbolism that they recognized. The genetic memory of the Soviet viewer unknowingly recognizes Orthodoxy. The use of religious symbolism in Eisenstein’s and Tarkovsky’s films are some of the most powerful representations of Orthodoxy during the Soviet regime. They call for the viewer to remember their culture, their history, reconnect with their past that was often condemned by the Soviet ideology.

15h50–16h15

“Advancement in Terror: Apocalyptic Literature, Combat Mythology, and Contemporary Zombie Cinema.”
Alexander Cox-Twardowski, Queen’s University

Religion and film both recreate worlds by juxtaposing past mythologies to accommodate contemporary audiences. This phenomenon influenced S Brent. Plate and John Lyden to argue that religion and film be studied analogously. In Judeo-Christian scripture and Hollywood film, both the Combat Myth and apocalypticism are examples of consistent mythologies adapting to best address a contemporary audience. Using John J. Collins’ scholarship on Judeo-Christian apocalypticism, and Walter Wink and Michael Nichols’ conceptions of the Combat Myth, I investigate the application of these mythologies to the contemporary zombie films, 28 Days Later (2002), Resident Evil (2002), and I Am Legend (2007). This is accomplished by firstly providing a workable
understanding of zombies, the Combat Myth, and the genre of apocalyptic literature. Next, the degree of cohesion between these mythologies and the three films is explored. This investigation reveals that the films possess a varying compatibility with contemporary conceptions of the Combat Myth and it is a useful approach to analyzing this genre of cinema. However, despite zombie films often being considered apocalyptic cinema, apocalyptic scholarship is of little value concerning these films. The results of this study reveal that religious mythology is still popularly represented through the medium of film. Furthermore, this research shows contemporary anxiety towards modernity, specifically that of scientific or medical advancement. This fear is expressed through new forms of cinematic zombies that challenges George A. Romero’s popular zombie archetype. Contemporary zombies continue to progress into quicker, scarier, and more intelligent monsters.

16h15–16h40

“Iconophobia in the Digital Age: Reading of Scott Derrickson’s Sinister (2012).”
Kevin Chabot, University of Toronto

The recent horror film Sinister (Scott Derrickson, 2012) follows true-crime novelist Ellison Oswalt (Ethan Hawke) who moves into a home with his family where a grisly murder had taken place. There, he finds a box of 8mm home movies that depict similarly gruesome deaths. Ellison soon discovers that the celluloid filmstrips contain the physical embodiment of the demon Bughuul, who proceeds to possess those who view the films. With its focus on analogue and digital image production as well as its narrative emphasis on the haunting presence of a Babylonian demon, I argue Sinister transports ancient iconophobia and apprehension toward the status of images—their inherent power to move the viewer and anxieties concerning the sentience and subjectivity of images themselves—into the digital realm. The film’s portrayal of haunted images speaks to the anxiety surrounding image production implicit in the Second Commandment. As W.J.T. Mitchell writes, the commandment not only forbids the creation of images that threaten to take the place of God, but effectively forbids the creation of any image. The logic structuring this commandment is the notion that human beings are too susceptible to the thrall of images, which threaten to supplant the worship of God for the fetishization of material objects. Given the gradual loss of celluloid film and the rise of digital technologies, I argue that analogue cinema and digitization echo these anxieties as our control over the production and circulation of images is threatened in our contemporary moment of media convergence.

16h40–16h55

Questions and Discussion
COMPETING IMAGES OF ETHICS AND AUTHORITY

15h25–15h50

“In Praise of No One: Constructing and Deconstructing the Image of Chan Master.”
Christopher Byrne, McGill University

In recent years, scholars have discredited the historicity of the Chan Buddhist claim to an unbroken line of mind-to-mind transmission passed down from master to disciple from before the time of Śākyamuni Buddha. In this paper, I analyze Chan master Hongzhi Zhengjue’s (1091–1157) praise poems for Chan patriarchs and masters in order to demonstrate how he himself playfully and poetically deconstructs and destabilizes the very notion of transmission, while simultaneously elevating masters from his own lineage as the embodiment of unsurpassed enlightenment. I argue that, on the one hand, Hongzhi praises the Chan patriarchs as extraordinary individuals who have each personally realized their own buddha-nature, attained enlightenment, and transmitted their realization to their successors according to the standard lineage mythology. On the other hand, Hongzhi’s poetic language emphasizes that buddha-nature consists of the inherent selflessness of all beings, where enlightenment is readily accessible to all and no transmission takes place, thus, undermining the traditional view of a special Chan lineage of select individuals. Through the use of metaphor and imagery, Hongzhi sustains these two contradictory levels of meaning, which question the assumption that Chan monks are necessarily committed to a linear model of transmission.

15h50–16h15

“Changing Perception of Ethics in Mahāyāna Buddhism—A Case Study.”
Julia Stenzel, McGill University

In Mahāyāna Buddhism, bodhisattvas are perceived as the embodiment of an ethical ideal. They are beings that devote their lives to attaining perfect awakening in order to save all other beings from suffering. Their training consists of virtues to cultivate and unwholesome actions to avoid. What happens, though, when bodhisattvas fail in their endeavour to attain perfection? What happens when they commit unwholesome actions? An examination of several texts pertaining to this aspect of Mahāyāna ethics reveals a tension between different perceptions of ethics, ethical transgression and the role of the transgressor. As a case study, I will discuss the fundamental transgressions of ethical behaviour that are taught by Buddha Śākyamuni in the Ākāśagarbha Sūtra, and the treatment of these same transgressions in later commentarial work in India and Tibet, focusing on The Compendium of Advice (Sikasamuccaya) by the influential Śāntideva (8th century), and The Treasury of Knowledge (shes bya kun khyab mdzod) by the Tibetan polymath Jamgon Kongtrul Rinpoche (jam mgon kong sprul, 1813–1899). As a
result of my comparative study I argue that we can identify competing images of the ideal Mahāyāna Buddhist practitioner. Whereas the Sūtra emphasises the importance of the practitioners’ faith and reliance on Bodhisattva Ākāśagarbha for the purification of ethical failure, later commentaries emphasize self-control and restraint. These competing images indicate a tension between ethical standards—a tension between reparatory ethics in the sūtra, and prescriptive ethics in the treatises.

16h15–16h40

“What Not To Wear: Religion, Ostentation, and Social Classification in Québec.”
Ian Alexander Cuthbertson, Queen’s University

The question “what counts as a religious sign?” has come to the fore in Québec where a bill has been tabled to ban state employees from wearing “ostentatious” religious symbols. Suddenly, certain kinds of religious signs have become extremely visible in the province—in part owing to a much circulated government graphic that provides a visual example of prohibited (ostentatious) and permitted (unostentatious?) garments and accessories. But while it seems clear that a large crucifix worn around the neck would be prohibited, it is unclear whether or not a pendant for protection against the evil eye would qualify as ‘religious,’ or ‘ostentatious,’ or both or neither. In this paper I attempt to shed light on the social classification of objects as religious or non-religious by examining ‘magical’ objects (e.g. good luck charms, protective amulets) in Montréal. Drawing on ongoing ethnographic research, I argue that the level of visibility of religious and ‘magical’ or para-religious objects in Montréal reveals more about distinctions between acceptable and unacceptable religion than it does about acceptable or unacceptable religious signs. Specifically, I argue that ostentatious religious signs have become a matter of contention in Québec because the public presence of these signs contradicts dominant conceptions of ‘religion’ that relegate religious practices, beliefs, and signs to the private sphere. Para-religious objects, on the other hand, remain invisible and unproblematic because their association with ‘magic’ allows them to be dismissed as examples superstition rather than sincere religion.

16h40–16h55

Questions and Discussion