ARCH 2010C

ARCHITECTURE, BODY AND PERFORMANCE IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EASTERN WORLD

Joukowsky Institute for Archaeology and the Ancient World
Brown University
Spring 2010

Meets Mondays 3-5:20 pm Rhode Island Hall 008
Instructor: Ömür Harmansah (Omur_Harmansah@brown.edu)
Assistant Professor of Archaeology and Egyptology and Ancient Western Asian Studies
Ömür’s Office Hours: Tuesdays 1-3 pm at Joukowsky Institute Room 102.
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Course Wiki: http://proteus.brown.edu/archbodyperform10

Course Description

Bodies make space speak. This graduate seminar investigates the relationship between bodily practices, social performances, and production of space. Contemporary critical theories on the body, its gender and sexuality, its materiality and everyday life will be explored, while new theories of architectural space and landscape will be discussed in the context of archaeological discourse. We will review recent archaeological work in the Ancient Near East to consider the impact of body and performance-related discussions in the field.

Contemporary discourses on body and performance in cultural studies and social theory have flourished drastically in the last two decades and continue to offer new avenues of research in the social sciences and the humanities. In this seminar, our goal is, on the one hand, to explore these new theoretical writings on embodiment, agency, subjectivity, bodily practices, social performances, spectacles, materiality and spatiality of body. On the other hand, we will review recent archaeological work, historical and literary sources from the ancient Near East, and
consider their scholarly interpretations influenced by contemporary discourses. Our task remains to be posing new research questions to the material culture of the ancient Near Eastern world in the light of our theoretical readings and attempt to device alternative approaches in understanding this corpus of archaeological evidence. Reflexively, we will consider how Near Eastern case studies can be used to critique overarching theories of the body, performance and material culture.

Course Requirements
Students are expected to do the weekly readings and participate in the seminar discussions. Participation, active involvement in the discussions, developing good note-taking habits as well as the contribution to the wiki are the most vital aspects of this course. A course wiki is created for the course to be used for discussions, posting of readings, announcements, assignments, and the like. Every student will have access to editing the wiki. Please familiarize yourself with the wiki, and make sure to check the site regularly, at least before each class meeting.

Response papers: In the first 6-7 weeks of the semester, following each seminar discussion, you will be asked to write short response papers and post them on the wiki. It is suggested that every member of the class focuses on one aspect of the week’s discussion that is critical to him/her, and provide a commentary. Your responses

Short paper assignment: This is a 6-8 page paper assignment that will come out of the ideas you will have accumulated in your response papers. It does not involve new research but expected to be a crystallization of your response papers into a chunkier piece of writing addressing issues discussed in class in greater depth. (Due March 26 Friday, 5 pm hard copy)

Class presentations: we will have weekly presentations of particular bodies of archaeological evidence, sites or particular readings. You will be asked to sign up for them on your own on the wiki. Look for topics marked as "Presentation" in the Weekly Schedule page and put your name on at least one.

Research project: Every student will choose a related research topic in collaboration with Ömür and turn it into a final project. Collaborations with others in the seminar are always encouraged. The project should involve the theoretical concepts/issues relating to architecture, body and performance and its application to an archaeological case study, relevant to our seminar discussions. The research project’s presentations will include a 15-20 min class presentation of the project (May 3), an 8-12 page draft (to be submitted on the day of the presentation) and a 20-25 page final paper (due).

Grading:

- Class participation 30%
- Response papers 15%
- Short paper assignment 15%
- Class presentations 10%
- Final research project 30%
Weekly Schedule

Week 1: Feb 1. Introduction: overview of the course.

Week 2: Feb 8. Body and its performances in recent critical theory and archaeology

Week 3. Feb 15. Body, image and knowledge: rock art and shamanistic performance
Göbeklitepe and Nevali Çori: early Neolithic sites in Southeastern Turkey.

Bodies: animal and human

Göbeklitepe and Nevali Çori: spaces of Neolithic performance (Presentation)

February 22 Long-weekend. No class
Çatalhöyük houses: social memory and everyday performance.

What is performance?

Çatalhöyük: architecture and everyday life (Presentation)

Week 5. March 8. A performative theory for prehistoric figurines

Beyond the goddess: Figurine studies and the Neolithic

Çatalhöyük figurine project (Presentation)
Figurines project website: http://www.catalhoyuk.com/figurines.html
Week 6. March 15. Royal tombs of Ur: Death rituals, bodily violence and burying the dead: transformed bodies

Body, violence, power

Royal tombs of Ur (Presentation)

Week 7. March 22. Embodied subjectivities: Constructions of gender and sexuality

Sexing the body

Naram Sin and the aspects of masculinity (Presentation)

March 27-April 4 Spring break

Week 8. April 5. The polemically trans-gendered and the hyper-sexual body in Mesopotamia

Nudity, sex and the Old Babylonian terracotta plaques


Lamentation priests


Terracotta plaques (Presentation)


Week 9. April 12. Ömür is out of town- no class

Week 10. April 19. Performing gender, performing sex: The debate over the Sacred Marriage ritual

Gender performance


Early Mesopotamian “sacred marriage” ritual (Presentation)


Week 11. April 26. Body, movement and landscape: phenomenology of the “lived body” in the place-world

Moving bodies in the landscape


Border Steles and Rock reliefs in the Ancient Near East


Week 12 May 3. Presentations of research projects.

Week. 13. May 10. Archaeological fieldwork as bodily performance


Final papers due: May 17th, by 5 pm. Hard copy in Ömür's mailbox.