Architecture, Body and Performance in the Ancient Near Eastern World

Syllabus

Meet Fridays 3:00-5:20 pm (the so-called O-hour) in Joukowsky Institute Seminar Room 203
Instructor: Ömür Harmansah (Visiting Assistant Professor)
Office Hours: Tuesday 10-12 am. (By appointment)
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Course Description

This seminar investigates the relationship between bodily practices, social performances and production of space, using case studies drawn from ancient Mesopotamia, Anatolia and Syria. Employing contemporary critical theories on the body, materiality and social practices, new theories of the making of architectural spaces and landscapes will be explored with respect to multiple geographical, historical contexts in the Ancient Near East.

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 devise 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.

Practicalities

Meeting schedule, reserves, WebCT etc.

- The readings on reserve are frequently digital and can be downloaded through OCRA Brown Library’s Online Course Reserves Access webpage is: http://dl.lib.brown.edu/reserves/). The course password is akitu.
- A wiki is created for this course and we will use this site interactively for out-of-class discussions, posting of announcements, assignments, and the like. Every student registered or auditing this course will have access to editing this page. Yes, you can freely edit the site, post your own work, make comments to your colleagues’ and professor’s postings. Our extensive use of this site will be mostly running forums on the Friday discussions. You will
be asked to post all your written assignments on the wiki (but you also have the option of not doing so, and using the traditional format of submitting hard copies to Ömür). Please familiarize yourself with the wiki, and make sure to check the site regularly, at least before each class meeting. Here is the wiki-site: http://metamedia.stanford.edu/projects/architecturebodyperformance/Home

• A WebCT site has also been created for this course and may be used occasionally during the semester for the posting of images and the like. You can access WebCT by logging in at: https://mycourses.brown.edu/webct/logonDisplay.dowebct

Book available at Brown Bookstore You are strongly recommended (but not required) to buy the following book now available at the bookstore. Over the course of the semester, we will try to read the entirety of this book. Remember that there is also a copy on reserve at the Rock. The book is also available online to Brown students:

http://library.brown.edu:80/record=b4017045


Course Requirements
Students are expected to do weekly readings regularly and comprehensively, and contribute to seminar discussions. They will be occasionally asked to volunteer for short presentations in class on selected articles, topics or a specific body of archaeological/textual material. In the first half of the semester, the written tasks will involve a series of brief response papers in relation to our theoretical discussions during the seminars. In the second half, students will focus on their research project. There will be no exams. Grading will be based on class participation (30%), class presentations (10%), response papers (20%), research project (40%).

Research project Students will choose a research topic in collaboration with the instructor and turn it into a project. The project should involve an analytical and critical discussion of a theoretical approach and its application to an archaeological case study, relevant to our seminar discussions on body, performance and architectural space. The main aim in the research project is the bridge the apparent gap between theoretical discussions in archaeology and the material evidence. The research project’s presentations will include a 15-20 min class presentation of the project, a 4-5 page draft (to be submitted on the day of the presentation) and a 12-20 page final paper.

Weekly Schedule


Readings:

**Presentation topic:** Ain-Ghazal-Pre-pottery Neolithic B Period pit of plaster human figures.

**Readings:**


**Optional:**


Week 4: Sept. 29. Performance, performativity and ritual: towards an understanding of performed and embodied spaces, subjects, societies. Sites: Göbekli Tepe-Nevali Çori.

**Presentation topic:** Neolithic in the Near East (an archaeological overview: current projects).

**Readings:**


   Presentation topic: TBA.

Readings:
Explore: http://www.catalhoyuk.com/

Week 6: Oct. 13. [Ömür out of town. This meeting will be rescheduled.] Materiality: artifacts and their performance in the social sphere. The case of the Uruk vase.
   Presentation topic: TBA.

Readings:

Week 7: Oct. 20. The body of the able ruler: Sexuality, representation and royal rhetoric in Gudea and Naram-Sin’s commemorative monuments.
   Presentation topic: TBA.

Readings:

Presentation topic: TBA.

Readings:


Week 9: Nov. 3. Situated bodies: phenomenology of space, place and landscape. Rock-reliefs of the Hittite, Late Hittite and the Assyrian landscapes.

Presentation topic: TBA.

Readings:


Presentation topic: TBA.

Readings:


Week 11: Nov. 17. Ritual action, politics and state spectacles: The Assyro-Babylonian Akitu festival

Presentation topic: TBA.
Readings:

Nov 24- Thanksgiving-no class.

Week 12: Dec. 1. Student presentations of research projects and discussion (Paper drafts-due)

Week 13: Dec. 8. Final meeting: wrap up discussion: Archaeology, archaeological performance and the contemporary world. (Drafts returned with feedback)

Readings:

Dec 18. – Final papers due. (5 pm- Ömür's box or door)