

Attending to the Dead: A Faculty Seminar on Mortality, Memory, and Material Culture

Proposal for the 2015-2016 academic year submitted by Hank Glassman to the Hurford Humanities Center Steering Committee, March 2012

This is a seminar in the cultural history of death. In particular, it focuses on the distillation and concretization of memory and affect in the form of monuments, gravestones, relics, paintings, sound recordings, photographs, and other objects. How do the dead continue to dwell among the living? What is the role of the tactile physicality of a keepsake article of clothing or the smooth stone of a grave in the process of grief and mourning? How do we read stories of the intrusion of the dead into the material world? What are the ghosts saying? And what will they wear? We will begin by reading broadly in theoretical literature on “the collective representation of death,” as Robert Hertz named it in the title of his seminal 1907 essay. We will read recent works in the cultural history of death and mourning to gain insight into various specific cultural contexts; then, we could move either towards a more comparative mode or return to a more abstractly theoretical approach to thanatology at the end of the seminar. While the interests of the participants will of course shape our syllabus, I imagine us reading primarily in the three fields: Anthropology, Archeology, and History. In terms of emphasis, historical work on the visual and material culture of death will be perhaps most central.

This seminar will be vigorously interdisciplinary and will range widely. We will read: 1) classic and new works in the anthropology of death ritual; 2) theoretical works on archeological practice and reflection on gravesites, burial mounds, crypts, and so on, as sources; 3) monographs by cultural historians addressing the visual and material culture of death through the close reading and thick description of a particular time and place. The range of topics is boundless, and one can imagine that each seminar participant would bring a wish list of items to add to the syllabus. This is how it should be. So please bring your interests. Public monuments? Spiritism? Zombies? Relics? Forensics/Discovery/Truth and Reconciliation? Kinship and gender ideology as expressed through death ritual? Hell tour literature? Coffin art and hearse art? The iconography of gravestones? Mummies? Of course, we will have a great deal to talk about and the literature in these fields is rich enough and expansive enough to connect the research interest of faculty across the disciplines and across the divisions.

Towards an Imagined Bibliography:

Ariès, Philippe. 1981. *The hour of our death*. New York: Knopf.

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Hallam, Elizabeth, and Jennifer Lorna Hockey, eds. 2001. *Death, memory, and material culture*. Oxford: Berg.

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Hertz, Robert. 2008 (1907). *Death and the right hand*. London: Routledge.

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Oliver, G. J. 2000. *The epigraphy of death: studies in the history and society of Greece and Rome*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press.

Parker Pearson, Michael. 2001. *The archaeology of death and burial*. Phoenix Mill [u.a.]: Sutton.

Paxton, Frederick S. 1990. *Christianizing death: the creation of a ritual process in early medieval Europe*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

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Rakita, Gordon F. M. 2005. *Interacting with the dead: perspectives on mortuary archaeology for the new millennium*. Gainesville: University Press of Florida.

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Rowe, Mark. 2011. *Bonds of the dead: temples, burial, and the transformation of contemporary Japanese Buddhism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

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