Methodologies and the Analytical Study of Religion

Friday, November 22, 1:00 - 5:00 p.m.

In its third year, SORAAAD will address a long overdue need to focus on the methodologies with which the field observes and analyzes the range of activity that falls loosely within or overlaps with religious experiences or things deemed special and social responses to and conflicts regarding things designated sacred. ¹

SORAAAD will focus on the selection, design, and implementation of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, as well as responsible ways to use quantitative and qualitative research generated by other scholars outside of the study of religion.

SORAAAD’s Methodologies and the Analytical Study of Religion will be of particular interest for graduate students and established scholars who already enact social science and critical humanities research methodologies, who want to implement newer or different methodologies, or who need to integrate existing social science and critical humanities research outside of religion (Sociology, Anthropology, Cognitive Science, Critical and Social Theories) into their research design, data acquisition and analysis.

Part One: Methodologies and the Study of Religion will address the implementation of particular methodologies and techniques: Discourse Analysis, Free Listing, Structured Observation, Ethnography and Grounded Theory. Our speakers will include Steven Engler, Kocku von Stuckrad, Michael Stausberg and Bron Taylor.

Part Two: Interdisciplinary Religious Research: Design, Implementation, and Collaboration will highlight the experience of integrating work on religion with social scientific methodologies such as fields experiments, GIS network analysis, cognitive science and Ethnography. With remarks from Ann Taves, our speakers will include: John Thibdeau, Michael Kinsella and Philip Deslippe

The suggested readings for each segment of the SORAAAD workshop will be, along with the presentations, the basis for discussion during each part of the workshop. Further readings are grounding points of reference for scholars new to a methodology or technique.

The SORAAAD workshop is sponsored by the SBL’s Ideological Criticisms Group, the Bible and Cultural Studies Section and the AAR’s Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion Group, the Sociology of Religion Group and the Cultural History of Religion Group.

For questions about or to reserve space in the workshop send an email to ctdr.group@gmail.com
Methodologies and the Analytical Study of Religion

Introduction (1:00 -1:10)
Ipsita Chatterjea - Presider - “SORAAAD Workshop Year Three and ‘Methodologies and the Analytical Study of Religion.’”

Part One: Methodologies and the Analytical Study of Religion.

(1:10-2:50) Four established scholars will discuss particular methodologies, techniques and their experiences with implementation in their respective studies of religious phenomena.

Speakers (Final Order to be determined by discussion amongst speakers):

Steven Engler Mount Royal University on Grounded Theory

Bron Taylor, University of Florida, on Ethnography

Michael Stausberg University of Bergen on Free Listing and Structured Observation.

Kocku von Stuckrad University of Groningen on Discourse Analysis.

Steven Engler: Grounded Theory (GT) is a structured but flexible process for drawing concepts, categories and theory from data, rather than applying or testing a given theory. This presentation will discuss the presuppositions and motivations of GT as a method and walk participants through the steps of a grounded research process. Steven will end by describing the place of GT in his current research project on spirit-possession in Brazil.

Suggested Reading for Steven Engler


Further Reading on Grounded Theory

Bron Taylor: Ethnography is, in the final analysis, and encounter between a collectivity identified by a researcher who then enters into a relationship with those perceived to be within it. As with any human relationship is fraught with difficulty but also the possibility of new understandings and even intimacy across the fluid researcher/interlocutor boundary, as well as between those directly involved in the encounter and those who read the researcher’s perceptions about it (and in rare cases, sometimes talk back from the subjects of the research themselves). The encounter is often complicated by the ways actors outside of the community view it and vise versa and how all of these actors come to understand the researcher. Bron will focus on the relational aspects of fieldwork based on decades of study of actors within the global environmental milieu, especially those involved in grassroots and radical environmental movements.

Suggested Reading for Bron Taylor’s segment:


Further Readings on Ethnography:

H. Russell Bernard, Research Methods in Anthropology: Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches (Fourth Edition), Lanham: Alta Mira, 2006


Michael Stausberg: Both methods or techniques that Michael will introduce generate valuable data but work best in combination with other methods. While observation is an established dimension of field research, typically relatively little attention is paid to the act of observing and to its notation. Studying rituals, for example, requires attentive observation, but there is little systematical observation documented in the literature, even when descriptions are impressive. Structured observation is a technique of planned, scheduled, systematic observation in natural settings. It yields data that can serve as a strategic antidote to recall and self-report based sources. Free-listing is a powerful and simple technique of eliciting data the use of which is all too seldom. It offers insight into the salience of information and distribution of knowledge. It makes relevant concepts and vocabulary easily available. Free-listing can be useful in initial stages, but also in advances stages of the research process.
Readings for Michael Stausberg


Kocku von Stuckrad: Discursive approaches to the study of religion have received increasing scholarly attention recently. However, while there is some consensus about the general theoretical framework of an analysis of religious discourse, there are as yet not many concrete examples of how such an analysis can be put into practice. After a brief introduction to the theoretical aspects of historical discourse and dispositive analysis, Kocku will apply these considerations to the research question of how we can reconstruct the transformation of discourses on science and religion at the beginning of the twentieth century. It will be shown that the analysis of 'discursive knots' and 'entangled discourses' helps to understand the new place of religion in secular environments in Europe and North America.

Suggested Readings for Kocku von Stuckrad’s segment.


Workshop Break (2:50 - 3:30)
The Workshop break is by design long enough to allow a break and for participants to talk to one another without a moderator as well as to enable follow up questions for the speakers for part one and pre-presentation questions for the speakers for part two.
Part Two: *Interdisciplinary Religious Research: Design, Implementation, and Collaboration*

**Presiding:** Randy Reed  3:30-3:35  
**Introductory Remarks -** Ann Taves, 3:35-3:40

(3:30 - 4:55 p.m.) In this part of the workshop Ann Taves of the University of California, Santa Barbara’s *Religion, Experience and Mind Lab Group* will introduce the mission of the group and the work of three associated researchers: Michael Kinsella (University of California - Santa Barbara), Philip Deslippe (University of California - Santa Barbara) and John Thibdeau (University of Colorado Boulder) They will in turn discuss their respective experiences of research design, data collection and analysis at the juncture of religion and ethnography, geographic informational science and social psychology and cognitive science.

**Michael Kinsella** applies experimental field methods in an ethnographic study of the near-death experience movement to better understand the roles that experiences and accounts of experiences play in shaping and reinforcing the potency of afterlife beliefs.

**Readings for Michael Kinsella’s segment**


**Philip Deslippe** utilizes geographic information science (GIS) methods and Montello’s work on quantifying vague concepts (2003 and 2012) to literally map the historical presence of yoga teachers, and to conceptually integrate various understandings of yoga, from history and popular culture to personal experience.

**Readings for Philip Deslippe’s segment**


-Or-

**John Thibdeau** draws upon various methods from social psychology, cognitive ethnography, and videography to develop a study on Sufi Sema and Dhikr (listening and remembrance) that fully integrates the interactive body.

**Readings for John Thibdeau’s segment**


-Or-


-And-


-Or-


**Business Meeting (4:55-5:00)**

The organizing committee wants to thank co-chair RANDY REED, ANN TAVES, MICHAEL STAUSBERG, AND STEVEN ENGLER AND FOR THEIR WORK TO DEVELOP THIS YEAR’S WORKSHOP.
The Study of Religion as an Analytical Discipline (2011-)

2011 - The Study of Religion as an Analytical Discipline
2012 - The Analytical Handling of Norms and Values in the Study of Religion
2013 - Methodologies and the Analytical Study of Religion

SORAAAD Committee Co-Chairs

Randall Styers - Cultural History of the Study of Religion co-chair - AAR
Randy Reed* - Ideological Criticisms of Biblical Studies co-chair - SBL
Rebecca Raphael - The Metacriticism of Biblical Scholarship Consultation co-chair - SBL
Craig Martin - AAR Member
Jens Kreinath* - Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion former Chair, current committee member - AAR
Ipsita Chatterjea* - Sociology of Religion co-chair - AAR
Jacques Berlinerblau - Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion co-chair - AAR
William Arnal - Critical Theories and Discourses on Religion co-chair - AAR

Former Co-Chairs.
Jorunn Jacobsen Buckley * 2011-2012
Greg Alles* 2011

* Founding Co-Chair of the SORAAAD Steering Committee