Philosophy Today
DOI: 10.5840/philtoday202019302

Faith

ANNA HICKEY-MOODY

Abstract: This essay advances a new materialist philosophy of faith. Mobilizing affect, I show that a change in the capacity to act, such as that created through belief or non-belief, is an experience that unites both secular and religious people. Belief in the superiority of secular culture over religious culture, or vice versa, are affectively similar corporeal orientations.

Key words: faith, affect, orientation

"[A]ll beliefs are acts of faith." (Braidotti 2008: 11)

Faith is an ontological state, an orientation, and a capacity to act. It is a set of practices, an embedded emotional geography that choreographs subjectivities and communities. Philosophies of religion often account for transcendental frameworks, as a religion is a belief structure; however, faith is material, a capacity to act characterized by belief in the world. This essay puts forward a new materialist theory of faith as a cosmological, ontological condition. This project draws on resources from new materialist philosophy to think about what it might mean to have faith. I locate this perspective alongside a literature review of fairly contemporary philosophical work on religion, and a survey of recent work on material cultures of religion, so as to make quite distinct the kinds of contributions being made by a new materialist understanding of faith. The need for such a perspective is made plain to me on a daily basis through the empirical research I undertake for my Interfaith Childhoods (2016–2021)[1] research project. In this fieldwork I speak to religious and secular community members in Australia and Britain, all of whom have faith. For some of these research participants this faith begins with a faith in a God, or Gods, yet, for many others it doesn't; for them faith is about connectedness to community, family, values, places, and rituals. Faith is a way of being a person and belong-

ISSN 0031-8256

ing to a community. It is a capacity to act, or a set of embodied orientations that limit capacity to act.

* * *

Having faith can increase, or alternatively decrease, a body's capacity to act. Faith can stop a person from connecting with another, can cause judgement, rejection, and create a "sharp edge" (Barad 2003: 803). Faith can also provide the capacity to reach out to others, to be there for others, to keep people going. Many people in my interfaith research tell stories of moving across worlds, living through wars, surviving change and separation from family, and their stories make clear the fact that faith can sustain people through very difficult times. Faith can give bodies the capacity to keep going. Faith can also generate embodied limits. For example, I was told I was going to hell for believing that all religions are equal by an angry Christian minister's secretary in the conservative outer Western suburbs of Sydney. As such, faith can be thought of as (in)capacity, as enabling and disabling.

In a manner similar to affect, faith aligns subjects to experience a moment in which "the mind is assailed by any emotion, [and] the body is affected at the same time by a modification whereby its power of acting is either increased or diminished" (Spinoza 1996: 148). Following Spinoza's lead, for Deleuze, and Deleuze and Guattari, *affect* refers to changes in bodily capacity. The body to which Deleuze refers is not necessarily human. It is a degree of power held within any given assemblage or *mixture*. Faith creates affects, in the respect that it extends or decreases the limits of what a *body*—or *a given assemblage or mixture*—can do. An affect, then, is the margin of change in capacity: a material and/or conceptual bloc that articulates an increase or decrease in a body's capacity to act.

We could use the term *faith* in a similar way to *affect*, to refer to changing bodies. The actual changes caused by the experience of faith are *affectus*, the empirical increase or decrease in subjective capacity made by an affect (Hickey-Moody 2009, 2013a, 2013b). In *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy* Deleuze articulates *affectus* as: "An increase or decrease of the power of acting, for the body and the mind alike" (1988: 49). He then expands this definition through arguing that *affectus* is different from emotion. While emotion is the psychological striation of affect, the way our experiences of change are captured by subjectivity, *affectus* is the virtuality and materiality of the increase or decrease effected in a body's power of acting. Objects such as religious icons, experiences of reciting a well-known prayer, joining with community in praying or eating, are enculturating, enculturated affective experiences. Deleuze explains:

> The *affection* refers to a state of the affected body and implies the presence of the affecting body, whereas the *affectus* refers to the passage [or movement]

> from one state to another, taking into account the correlative variation of the affecting bodies. Hence there is a difference in nature between the *image affections* or *ideas* and the *feeling affect*. (1988: 49)

Thus, *affectus* is the materiality of change: it is *the passage from one state to another* which occurs in relation to *affecting bodies*. The image affections, or ideas, to which Deleuze refers, can be the idea of a god, or gods, or an image of the religious deities or figures in which people believe. Increasing or decreasing one's capacity to act is the modulation of *affectus*: the virtual and material change that prompts affection or *feeling* in consciousness (Hickey-Moody 2013a, 2013b). We can understand faith attachments and the act of believing in something as exactly this virtual and material change that prompts affection or the *feeling of affect* in consciousness. Deleuze's work on creating changes in embodied capacities begins with his reading of Spinoza. In *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy*, Deleuze explains:

> The affections [*affectiones*] are the modes [forms of life] themselves. The modes are the affections of substance [matter, the universal] or of its attributes. . . . These affections are not necessarily active, since they are explained by the nature of God as adequate cause, and God cannot be acted upon. . . . At a second level, the affections designate that which happens to the mode, the modifications of the mode [*affectus*], the effects of other modes on it. These affections are therefore images or corporeal traces first of all . . . and their *ideas* involve both the nature of the affected body and that of the affecting external body. . . . [Then, quoting Spinoza's *Ethics*,] 'The affections of the human body whose ideas present external bodies as present in us we shall call images of things. . . . And when the mind regards bodies in this way we shall say that it imagines.' (1988: 48)

If feeling is a signifier of *affectus* can we say that faith is also a signifier of *affectus*? It seems to me that we can. Deleuze reminds us of how feelings, and to this I would add beliefs, mark our emotional geographies. This is Deleuze's Spinozist framework for thinking about the ways ideas and interactions can create conceptual and material changes. For Spinoza, substance is the stuff of which life is made. It is expressed in modes, which are changed (affected or *modulated*) by affections (*affectiones*). *Affectiones* are traces of interaction: residues of experience that live on in thought and in the body. They make affects, modulations marked by our feelings. Faith, then: the belief that something is possible, or that something is inherently wrong, changes capacities in ways that are marked by feelings. Faith in religion, and faith in social values, choreographs people, societies, and relationalities.

Following this understanding of assemblages of places, objects, people, belief, as ways of shaping patterns of feeling, we can see that faith can become a map, an internal-external set of co-ordinates that moves bodies to act and re-act in certain ways. This map is living; it is a dynamic, responsive, and very alive part of people's

engagements with their contexts. In being responsive, faith is always being remade; it shapes streams of consciousness that flow across established patterns of feeling.

* * *

Drawing on Iris van der Tuin's analysis of diffraction, as a practice designed to "provoke change . . . [through paying attention to] cracks in the academic canon" (2015: 100), I offer a diffractive engagement with philosophies of religion as examples of some exteriorities held within bodies that have faith. Philosophies of religion have very little to do with many people's faith practices, which are often performances of commitment to community, values, and belonging rather than an investment in existential ideology. As one of my research participants explains, she is drawn to community rather than abstract belief:

> Growing up white Anglican . . . there wasn't that huge amount, you know, that really convivial, come to my bosom and let's all have a big casserole and all that kind of stuff. It was really quite austere and quite straighty-one-eighty. When I married [Simon], who was at the time Bahai religion, something that I found really, absolutely delightful about that was all these Persian people who bring you into the house, and feed you and cuddle you and just I absolutely adore that. ("Nancy," 2018)

Turning to think about philosophies of religion then, is a way of mapping some of the many constellations in faith-based patterns of feelings, but often these constellations are points that those who have faith define themselves against, or as being different from.

In his 2014 book *Reinventing Philosophy of Religion: An Opinionated Introduction*, Graham Oppy draws our attention to the impossibility of a consistent definition of religion—since, although over half the world has faith in a religion, defining exactly what a religion is must always be a context-specific task. Oppy explains:

> Perhaps the very first question that arises for philosophy of religion is whether there is any such thing as *religion*. This question seems straight-forward. We are all familiar with Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Jainism, Sikhism, Shintoism, Taoism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. What are these, if not religions? Of course, recognizing that the major world religions are religions does not guarantee that we can decide harder cases, nor does it guarantee that we will not go seriously wrong if we try to give a definition of 'religion.' On the one hand, you might well be unsure whether Scientology—or Discordianism, or the Church of MOO—is a religion; on the other hand, you might think that we simply misunderstand ancestor worship if we think of it as being a kind of religion. (2014: 3)

My in-depth conversations about faith with people who belong to religious communities have taught me that often people's faith and attachments are about lived experiences, habits and values more than abstract beliefs. Faith is largely an embodied practice, not an abstract idea. While Oppy's inquiry is shaped by a liberal understanding of what religion is, he develops a new idea of what philosophy is when looking to study religion:

> On any account of religion, it is clear that there are many ways that one might choose to study it. History, anthropology, geography, sociology, demography, and psychology all promise to yield significant information about religion. Perhaps the study of literature, music, painting, sculpture, and architecture will do so as well. However, while philosophy of religion ought not to proceed in ignorance of the information that is yielded by other approaches to the study of religion, the questions that are taken up by philosophers of religion will not be straightforwardly answered by that information. (Oppy 2014: 6)

Arguably, philosophical questions are never straightforwardly answered. In developing a contemporary philosophical perspective on faith, I would contend that it must be informed by, or at least developed in relation to, religions that inspire faith. This is a diffractive reading that takes "off elsewhere" and has "differing effects" (Van der Tuin 2018: 100) from canonical engagements with philosophies of religion. Indeed, I would go so far as to say that, in thinking through faith as an embodied experience, we can see that people who belong to different religions have more in common than they have separating them. This is very different from the transcendental model of divides between religions put forward by Oppy:

> Because differences in religious beliefs and religious worldviews are themselves grounded in differences in religious history, religious tradition, religious scripture, religious authority and religious experience, it seems implausible to suppose that one can appeal to considerations drawn from religious history, religious tradition, religious scripture, religious authority and religious experience in order to decide between competing religious worldviews. (2014: 41–42)

A Deleuzo-Spinozist reading of faith as a capacity to act shows us that belonging to a religion is not so much about having one worldview, but rather about feeling belonging and being connected to communities. For Oppy, religion is cognitive rather than embodied, but cognitive constellations need to be understood as images of things around which beliefs and capacities to act are organized.

Birgit Meyer's formative and enduringly useful 2003 piece "Material Mediations and Religious Practices of World-Making" offers resources more in line with the contemporary philosophy of faith I develop here. Meyer argues that

> [s]ecularization theory with its inbuilt teleology gave way to an understanding of religion as being in constant transformation into multiple directions. The

> question of how (and why) religion transforms is at the core of much current research, yielding a strong emphasis on detailed case studies that place religion in broader social-cultural settings. (Meyer 2003: 1–2)

The experience of having faith is context-specific; it is a located, historically situated, embodied imagining of what the future might be (Braidotti 2008: 18), and what the present is.

Meyer also sees religion as a located and very much embodied practice:

> Realizing the limitations of understandings of religion that foreground the level of the mind, scholars signaled the need to pay urgent attention to actual religious practices of engaging with things, words, pictures, and other religious forms. Materiality became a key term. Far from designating simply the empirical study of religious material culture from a practice perspective, the point is to 're-materialize' our conceptual approaches of religion. (Meyer, 2003: 2)

This requires a critical engagement with the post-Enlightenment romanticist Protestant bias that still haunts the modern study of religion (Meyer 2010a) as well as openness toward the spheres of the everyday level of "lived religion," asking how religion becomes tangible in "the world" (Meyer 2003: 2).

In *Religions, Reasons and Gods: Essays in Cross-Cultural Philosophy of Religion* Clayton, Blackburn, and Carroll (2006) show us that cross-cultural philosophies of religion are much more about the ways religious beliefs orient a body and provide frameworks in which a body becomes:

> Theistic arguments as forms of conceptual analysis might help us better understand the place and nature of gods in religious traditions, thereby leading to a clearer sense of the comparative grammar of religion: the rules of discourse about the gods. Such rules of discourse would show what would count as gods, the kinds of properties such beings possess and their place in different religious forms of life—for we cannot assume that the gods play the same role in all traditions any more than we can assume, e.g., that constitutions play the same role in all countries. Identification of the rules of discourse about the gods might also serve specifically philosophical ends. . . . From this point of view, religious contexts would provide particularly interesting examples of some of the most difficult philosophical puzzles, and could contribute to their clarification or even solution. (Clayton, Blackburn, and Carroll 2006: 306)

As the authors here make clear, understanding religious philosophy is impossible outside context, namely, the contexts in which philosophy is generated, appreciated, and given life. In fact, context makes religion over again and again; it makes faith over again and again. "A thousand tiny faiths," after Deleuze and Guattari's "thousand tiny sexes." Clayton, Blackburn, and Carroll continue, explaining that

> [c]ontrary to dominant post-Enlightenment emphasis upon consensus, examining the actual contexts in which theistic proofs are used leads to a greater appreciation of the differences, not the sameness of humankind's understanding of divinity. The craving for all rationally achieved consensus is in part an indirect reaction to the competing claims of religious traditions and more directly a protest against the sectarian bitterness that had arisen during and in the century or so of conflict after the Reformation. A Utopian dream it may have been, but its achievement should not be underestimated. In any case, in a pluralistic society such as ours is increasingly becoming, substantive consensus about means of goals is unlikely; the only consensus for which one can hope is a framework in which differences can be protected as well as commonalities identified. (Clayton, Blackburn, and Carroll 2006: 307)

The differences and commonalities to which the authors refer are enacted and carried on through the body, through faith and (in)capacities to act that shape cultures and perform life worlds.

* * *

In this final section of the essay, I want to propose an immanent reading of faith as an embodied experience that is shaped by material cultures of religion and by the "post-secular" state. Here, I take my cue from Rosi Braidotti, who astutely observes that

> [t]he legacy of psychoanalysis allows us to challenge received ideas about the rationality of political subjectivity. Let us take a simple notion, such as faith in social progress and the self correcting powers of democratic governance. In a psychoanalytic perspective, the operational concept here is faith itself. Psychoanalysis is a sober reminder of our historically cumulated contradictions: we are confronting today a post secular realization that all beliefs are acts of faith, regardless of their propositional content—even—or especially, when they involve the superiority of reason, science and technology. All belief systems contain a hard core of spiritual hope—as Lacan put it: if you believe in grammar, you believe in God. (2008: 11)

There is no purely transcendental faith, for those who are and for those who are not religious. For those who are religious, even when they subscribe to transcendental beliefs, the modulations of faith they experience are embodied affects. These are often co-created through visual and material cultures of religion, as John Cort (1996) shows us:

> A look at the material culture of a religious tradition indicates that texts alone are insufficient. Texts at best provide only a limited perspective on a religion. Two centuries of textual studies have led to an academic understanding of Jainism[2] as an ascetic, world-renouncing, unaesthetic religious tradition. . . .

> Looking only at texts has blinded scholars to the extent that Jains for centuries have built temples, sculpted and adorned images, painted, embroidered textiles, and created a myriad of other objects–in short, have created a full material culture. (630–31)

Material cultures are at the heart of religious practices; they are just not always at the heart of academic methods for understanding religion. This argument is further developed by Matthews-Jones and Jones (2015) who explain: "On the one hand, objects are shaped by people and cultures and become expressive of their beliefs and values. On the other hand, objects have the potential to shape and condition people. An appreciation of these twin processes is essential to understanding religious faith and spirituality" (2). Here, we see that visual and material cultures of religion are key in constituting how faith is experienced by those who are involved in religions: "Rather than perceiving them as the end product, or as a reflection, of social and cultural systems, material-culture scholars prefer to see objects as playing an active, constitutive role in the construction and maintenance of these very systems. Early work tended to draw on a broadly Marxist perspective, focusing on the commodification process, on the commodity fetish as a feature of bourgeois culture, and on the alienation caused by modern production processes" (Matthews-Jones and Jones 2015: 2). There is an alignment here with Braidotti's argument that the contemporary political and cultural globalized world generates faith experiences through immanent experiences and material, embedded engagements with worldviews. Indeed,

> [r]eligiosity is not simply an internal belief that comes to find codified form in the written texts of religious institutions. Religion is also constructed in the day-to-day, through people's engagement with material things. Thus belief is not static, but negotiated through contact with everyday objects. *Belief is highly dependent on the sensory experiences that enable people to make meaning out of their faith*. (Matthews-Jones and Jones 2015: 3; emphasis added)

Indeed, through a Deleuzo-Guattarian lens, faith (and belief in faith) is not dependent on sensory experience, but rather is a product of sensory experiences. Such sensory experiences are both responses to transcendental knowledge that is taught as "religion, and participation in everyday events and cultural experiences that shape religion. Through a Deleuzo-Spinozist lens, just such everyday experiences of being involved in visual, material, and sensory cultures of religion produces embodied imagination; it creates ideas of things, belief, and faith in beliefs. From such a perspective, religion is created by faith, which is a response to visual and material cultures.

These are always both located and contextually specific and globalized; for example, while Christianity's colonizing project is echoed in its continued quantitative popularity (around 2.1 billion Christians worldwide), links between Christianity

and colonization have long been muddied by, for example, Ireland, the first decolonizing country's substantive Catholic population, and by the contemporary majority of non-white Christian believers across the globe. After Christianity, Islam has around 1.3 billion followers across the globe, and Hinduism 900 million, and, of course, this list could go on. Religions always have been, and are now more than ever, global and globalizing. This, of course, has implications also for the continued and varied ways in which the colonial project is carried on in various ways through religions. Indeed, as Richard Mann (2014) shows, the colonial imperative was translated into scholarship in the form of disdain for the material:

> For many archaeologists and art historians during the colonial period such as Henry Cole, Alexander Cunningham and John Marshall . . . the historical appearance of material culture in India was interpreted as a sign of religious decay. In the case of Buddhism, the tradition was perceived of as having degenerated from its 'original' rational and ethical heights to a corrupt, superstitious and idolatrous tradition. Indeed, for many, the sign of this degeneration was the emergence of Buddhist iconography, ritual and material culture. Similar narratives of decline and debasement were used to characterize Hinduism as well. . . . The materiality of Hinduism and Buddhism was perceived of as an indication of a society that had de-evolved from sophistication to superstition; a slide the British argued they would correct with their own notions of high religious culture. (267–68)

In order to avoid re-colonizing culture through scholarly paradigms, we need to heed Braidotti's reasoned call for Europeans to develop a critical perspective on their imagination of themselves as "moral guardians of the world" (2008: 8) and to refuse exchanging transcendental thought for immanent thought which is mobilized in similarly problematic ways. This appeal is restated in different terms in Matthews-Jones and Jones's later work:

> The intellectual tradition that has privileged religion-as-thought over religion-as-material is part of that highly problematic modernist tradition in which all sorts of binaries—mind/body, male/female, modern/pre-modern, civilized/uncivilized, and so on—have taken on the appearance of universal truth rather than ideological construct. Just as we have come to question these binaries in relation to histories of gender and sexuality, for example, so too we should question assumptions made about practices of belief in modern societies. (2015: 4)

Belief is experienced as faith, because all faith needs to be understood as felt and embodied; it is a response to objects, ideas, places, and practices. In *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*, Colleen McDannell (1995) offers a located perspective on the material organization of feelings through explaining that

> [t]he symbol systems of a particular religious language are not merely handed down, they must be learned through doing, seeing, and touching. Christian material culture does not simply reflect an existing reality. Experiencing the physical dimension of religion helps *bring about* religious values, norms, behaviors, and attitudes. Practicing religion sets into play ways of thinking. It is the continual interaction with objects and images that makes one religious in a particular manner. (2)

Material cultures shape patterns of feeling, for those who have faith in the power of science and whose faith experiences are choreographed in relation to science laboratories and periodic tables, and also for those who have faith in religious deities or God.

A contemporary philosophy of faith, then, needs to be informed by human-non-human intra-actions with visual and material cultures of religion, as well as by philosophies of immanence that locate the body as core to knowledge production. This is, perhaps, a moment where philosophy needs to look outside itself, and fold in otherness. Indeed, we can take Deleuze and Guattari's Spinozist dividual, the idea of the body as one part of a larger whole, filled with immanent knowledge, Gatens's and Lloyd's bodies that share collective imaginings, or shared social fictions in Braidotti's nomadic subject as a philosophical model that intra-acts with the otherness of material cultures of religion. Here, philosophy becomes the "subject looking for the ways in which otherness prompts, mobilizes and allows for the affirmation of what is not contained in the present conditions" (Braidotti 2008: 19).

In "Integrating Texts and Material Culture: Methodological Approaches to the Study of Premodern Religions" Abhishek Amar (2012) suggests that: "The privileging of textual sources over archaeological ones has been a major problem in the historiography of premodern South Asian religions" (528). This call for a reconsideration of the material is carried on in "The Bow and the Blanket: Religion, Identity and Resistance in Rarámuri Material Culture," where Jerome Levi argues that "renewed consideration of the material markers of internal differentiation is a complementary balance to recent discourse emphasizing linkages between global and local economies" (1998: 300). As Van der Tuin (after Elizabeth Grosz) characterizes new materialism as a means for locating "'the surprise of the future' that we find in the past" (2015: 10), Levi argues that religious "*objects* are not inert relics from the past but, on the contrary, *are active strategies for the present*" (1998: 300; emphasis added). Religious objects are strategies for the present and for subjectivation; they are constellation points that shape faith experiences. Religious objects inform what David Morgan (2015) calls "the social life of feeling." Morgan also re-instates this contention that the body and embodied engagements with material cultures of religion shape social imaginations. He suggests that

> [t]o belong to a community is to participate, to take part, to perform a role, to find a place within the imagined whole, which I have called the social body.

> Belief, it is important to point out, is not simply assent to dogmatic principles or creedal propositions, but also the embodied or material practices that enact belonging to the group. The feeling that one belongs takes the shape of many experiences, unfolds over time, and is mediated in many forms. Moreover, belonging is nurtured by the aesthetic practices that are designed to generate and refine feeling on the crossed axes of human relationships and human–divine interaction. (Morgan 2015: 141)

The intra-action between material aesthetics, feeling, and sociality is central here.

If we take the thesis about affect seriously, then of course aesthetics is at the core of our experience, but ideas also shape how we interact with material worlds and need to be considered as one of the factors impacting affective states—people have faith in ideas as much as in things. There is, then, a sense in which studies of the visual and material culture of religion reify the material realm for existing outside iconoclastic ideals or dogmatic structures. While this is largely true, engagements with material cultures can be iconoclastic, can be dogmatic, and are also popularly entwined with ideology. Any distinct split between the two is a Cartesian binary construction that cannot be upheld in real life. Bağlı (2015) gestures towards the slippery nature of the material world, in explaining the connection between the existential, the abstract, and the material. Bağlı notes:

> The special case of religious symbols differs from the symbols in daily life like traffic signs, where we can make the connection between signifier and signified much easier. However in the case of religion, the metaphysical or 'unknown' nature of the signified (God) and the interconnectedness of the signifier—ritual—to the signified make the process of analysis much harder and more complicated. (2015: 306)

The lived experience of having faith, then, is a complex assemblage that is different for everyone who has faith, but it is always a complex and context-specific mixture of the material, the immaterial, community ritual, and family history. Bağlı (2015) examines this slippery-ness, or this complexity as a new terrain in scholarship, reminding us that

> [i]f we are to talk about the functionality of a religious object, it is usually directly related to an action as a part of a ritual or a practice, e.g., prayer beads (rosaries), prayer rugs, etc. The symbolic aspect, however, is more peripheral. It uses representation of some abstract values connected to the system of belief or certain religious figures mostly in the form of icons, without necessarily being connected to any religious practice. (306)

Indeed, Bağlı is not the only scholar to argue (see Xing Wang 2018) that reading symbols as being significant to religious experiences is a colonial importation, if not a racist imposition:

> The symbolic aspect is an important part of the aesthetics of the products defined and determined by areas of limitations and freedom in terms of representation. Different manifestations of values shape the whole system of signification and symbolization. For Islam, one of them and maybe the most important one is the critical distance to the iconic representation. (Bağlı 2015: 306)

Islamic culture's preference for calligraphy, its specific choreographic work around the body in prayer and how praying bodies are positioned in space and time when praying, and the material rituals of washing, fasting, and sharing meals are the organizing material cultural aspects of the religion that hold power, rather than the focus of symbols that characterizes Catholic, Christian, Hindu, and Buddhist religions. As such, we need to have an intra-active, mutable, re-shapeable, and engaged material-conceptual position on what a new materialist philosophy of faith might be. Faith is engendered by ideas, by practices, places, rituals, symbols, and these intersect in ways that generate unbounded zones of relationality, informing experiences of faith.

Material culture cannot be separated from ideas, from belief and indeed ideology. It is not a virgin realm that innocently shapes our experience. Rather, material culture and ideology co-constitute each other and intra-act in productions of the experience of faith. This point is made in slightly different, perhaps more anthropological terms, by Nicole Boivin in her 2009 piece "Grasping the Elusive and Unknowable: Material Culture in Ritual Practice." Boivin argues that,

> [f]ollowing scholars like Clifford Geertz, many archaeologists have, indeed, seen religion as a 'system of symbols.' The recognition that many of these symbols are material ones, recoverable in the archaeological record, has helped to make ancient religion somewhat accessible to the trowels (and interpretive frameworks) of archaeologists. [However, she also cautions that:] despite increased interest in recent years in the material dimension of religious practice, particularly within the discipline of archaeology, studies of the material and artifactual aspects of ritual continue largely to overlook the materiality of ritual objects and landscapes. (2009: 269)

Boivin shows us that material systems of signification are remade, reinvented within the tangle of context specific intra-action that constitutes practices of faith. Coding systems break down and are hacked, re-coded in everyday life:

> A recognition of the relevance of the physical qualities of material signs had often been implicit in structuralist analyses in archaeology anyhow, and both anthropologists and archaeologists came to recognize more explicitly that the meaning of material signs was often motivated by their physical qualities. One early anthropological example of such a recognition can be found in the work of Victor Turner, whose extensive mid-1960s' analysis of ritual symbols

> among the Ndembu of Zambia explored in some detail the links between material signifiers and the concepts they signify. (Boivin: 272)

Turner's work is but one early example of the shifting meaning religious symbols can hold. The other point I make in framing intra-action above is that sharing food, drink, and community togetherness is a key part of entanglements that create faith. This, too, is a point made consistently in the literature examining material cultures of religion. For example, Uri Kaplan (2017) shows us that the individual nature of faith is co-constituted by consumption (food and drink) in material culture, explaining that

> [e]ating and drinking (and abstention from which) play central roles in religious rites, where re-enacting mythologies jogs to life collective memories and re-confirms religious adhesion and distinctiveness . . . facilitating communication between individuals and their communities, as well as with their ancestors and gods. (Kaplan 2017: 4)

Putting the question of transubstantiation aside for now, we can see there are many ways in which the consumption of food is part of faith-assemblages, as are ritual performances, as characterized by Christiane Gruber (2017):

> Dodging dogma as verbalized in prescriptive texts and modern curbs implemented in more conservative milieus, votive practices and objects have long been a hallmark of creative activity among members of the global Muslim community. Early Arabic narrative sources tell us about devotees placing votive candles in shrines, while contemporary Muharram mourning ceremonies provide their participants with a rich *Gesamtkunstwerk*, blending processional and musical performances with votive objects and foods. (99)

All those who have faith make it themselves, even if they do so unconsciously. Rituals, consumption practices, signification practices are citational practices that choreograph faith experiences. Any useful philosophical perspective on faith needs to be informed by interdisciplinary knowledges, since "[w]hen scholars of religion write on materiality . . . they generally benefit from an art historian's perspective, just as art historians with scant training in religious studies frameworks may benefit from the insights of a reader in that discipline" (Floyd and Promey 2018: 267).

In developing this new materialist perspective on faith and drawing on interdisciplinary resources to think about the production of faith as an affective experience, I want to show the complex ways people are moved to believe. We all have to have faith in something. Our faith is both an expression of context and a political act. Faith, like the body, is a thermometer of social becomings and, wherever we are situated and whatever we profess, faith is the means by which we continue to become who we are. Let us investigate this in its material-conceptual-social and historical complexity.

RMIT University

Notes

1. This research is funded by the Australia Research Council Future Fellowship FT160100923 "Early Start Arts to Counter Radicalization."
2. Janeism is a non-theistic religion founded in India in the 6th century BC by the Jina Vardhamana Mahavira as a reaction against the teachings of orthodox Brahmanism, and still practised there. The Jain religion teaches salvation by perfection through successive lives, and non-injury to living creatures, and is noted for its ascetics.

References

Amar, Abhishek S. 2012. "Integrating Texts and Material Culture: Methodological Approaches to the Study of Premodern Religions." *Material Religion* 8(4): 528–29. https://doi.org/10.2752/175183412X13522006994971

Bağlı, Hümanur. 2015. "Material Culture of Religion: New Approaches to Functionality in Islamic Objects." *The Design Journal* 18(3): 305–25. https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2015.1059598

Barad, Karen. 2003. "Posthumanist Performativity: Toward an Understanding of How Matter Comes to Matter." *Signs* 28(3): 801–31. https://doi.org/10.1086/345321

Boivin, Nicole. 2009. "Grasping the Elusive and Unknowable: Material Culture in Ritual Practice." *Material Religion* 5(3): 226–87. https://doi.org/10.2752/175183409X12550007729860

Braidotti, Rosi. 2008. "In Spite of the Times: The Postsecular Turn in Feminism." *Theory, Culture & Society* 25(6) (November): 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1177/0263276408095542

Clayton, John Powell, Anne M. Blackburn, and Thomas D. Carroll. 2006. *Religions, Reasons and Gods: Essays in Cross-cultural Philosophy of Religion*. New York: Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511488399

Cort, John E. 1996. "Art, Religion, and Material Culture: Some Reflections on Method." *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 64(3): 613–32. https://doi.org/10.1093/jaarel/LXIV.3.613

Deleuze, Gilles. 1988. *Spinoza, Practical Philosophy*. Translated by Robert Hurley. City Lights Publishers.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Felix Guattari. 1988. *A Thousand Plateaus*. Translated by Brian Massumi. Vol. 2 of *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*. London: Continuum.

Floyd, Emily C., and Sally M. Promey. 2018. "Collaborative Scholarly Communities and Access in the Study of Material and Visual Cultures of Religion." *Religion* 48(2): 262–75. https://doi.org/10.1080/0048721X.2018.1445603

Gruber, Christaine. 2017. "Back to Nature: The Votive in Islamic Visual and Material Cultures." *Material Religion* 13(1): 99–101. https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2017.1272737

Hickey-Moody, A. 2009. *Unimaginable Bodies: Intellectual Disability, Performance and Becomings*. Rotterdam: Sense. https://doi.org/10.1163/9789087908553_003

Hickey-Moody, Anna. 2013a. "Affect as Method: Feelings, Aesthetics and Affective Pedagogy." In *Deleuze and Research Methodologies*, edited by Rebecca Coleman and Jessica Ringrose, 79–95. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Hickey-Moody, Anna. 2013b. *Youth, Arts and Education: Reassembling Subjectivity through Affect*. Abingdon: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203855829

Kaplan, Uri. 2017. "From the Tea to the Coffee Ceremony: Modernizing Buddhist Material Culture in Contemporary Korea." *Material Religion* 13(1): 1–22. https://doi.org/10.1080/17432200.2016.1271969

Levi, Jerome M. 1998. "The Bow and the Blanket: Religion, Identity and Resistance in Rarámuri Material Culture." *Journal of Anthropological Research* 54(3): 299–324. https://doi.org/10.1086/jar.54.3.3630650

Mann, Richard D. 2014. "Material Culture and the Study of Hinduism and Buddhism." *Religion Compass* 8: 264–73. https://doi.org/10.1111/rec3.12116

Matthews-Jones, Lucinda, and Timothy Willem Jones. 2015. "Introduction: Materiality and Religious History." In *Material Religion in Modern Britain: The Spirit of Things*, edited by Timothy Willem Jones and Lucinda Matthew-Jones, 1–14. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137540638_1

McDannell, Colleen. 1995. *Material Christianity: Religion and Popular Culture in America*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.

Meyer, Birgit. 2013. "Material Mediations and Religious Practices of World-Making." In *Religion Across Media: From Early Antiquity to Late Modernity*, edited by Knut Lundby, 1–19. New York: Peter Lang.

Morgan, David. 2015. "The Look of Sympathy: Religion, Visual Culture, and the Social Life of Feeling." *Material Religion: The Journal of Objects, Art and Belief* 5(2): 132–55. https://doi.org/10.2752/174322009X12448040551567

Oppy, Graham. 2014. *Reinventing Philosophy of Religion: An Opinionated Introduction*. London: Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137434562

Spinoza, Baruch. 1996. *Ethics*, 6th ed. Translated by Edwin Curley. London: Penguin Books.

Van der Tuin, Iris. 2015. *Generational Feminism: New Materialist Introduction to a Generative Approach*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.

Van der Tuin, Iris. 2018. "Diffraction." *Posthuman Glossary*, edited by Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, 99–101. London: Bloomsbury Academic.

Wang, Xing. 2018. "Rethinking Material Religion in the East: Orientalism and Religious Material Culture in Contemporary Western Academia." *Religions* 9(2). https://doi.org/10.3390/rel9020062