

International Conference

**Transforming Spirit Bodies: Changing Materialities and Embodied Dependencies**

September 29–30, 2022; Bonn, Germany

Organized by [Sinah Kloß](#), [Lena Muders](#), and [Taynã Tagliati](#) ([Research Group “Marking Power”](#))

Bodies are never fixed and stable, but transform over time, and in different contexts. This applies to both human bodies and to the bodies of nonhumans, including spirits, ancestors, and ghosts. All bodies may be considered to exist in a variety of conditions, matters, and elements. They can be conceptualized as hot or cold, fluid or dry, volatile or solid, open or closed, etc., depending on factors, such as the social and ecological environments they are embedded in, or the individual’s life stage. Bodies may change according to their immediate, distant, or transcendent surroundings. They may be actively or unconsciously manipulated and modified by social actors (including humans, spirits, animals, objects, deities, etc.). They may also visualize, materialize, and performatively (re-)create the power relations and asymmetrical dependencies that humans and nonhumans experience, and are influenced by, in their everyday lives.

This conference focuses on the bodies and embodiments of spirits, their (im-)materialities, and the bodily transformations, which they may be subject to in different socio-cultural contexts. It draws attention to the embodied experiences of asymmetrical dependencies among humans and spirits and to how the sensory experiences of interdependence are negotiated in their interactions.

Spirits may transform their own bodies or may be actively manipulated and modified by humans. Humans may embody spirits in specific religious, ritual, and spiritual contexts. This can occur, for example, during healing rituals and by way of “constructive” possession, or when spirits afflict humans and take possession of their bodies in harmful ways that negatively affect an individual’s health and wellbeing. In such situations, spirit and human bodies may mingle, overlap, unite, compete, or fight in a single entity, though a wider range of social actors and their bodies are often part of these dynamics and practices. They experience close and intimate body-to-body contact, which may enable a mutual exchange of (im-)material energies and substances, and that may require different levels or states of in/tangibility, in/visibility, in/audibility, and extra/sensory perceptibility.

These conditions and similar contexts involve various processes and dynamics through which human and spirit bodies transform: from visible to invisible, material to immaterial, and tangible to intangible. We are, thus, interested in examining potentially contrasting understandings of im/material, extra/sensory, and in/tangible, which, with regard to “bodies,” may be understood as dualistic or gradual in different cultural contexts. We seek to examine and compare the particular (historical) moments and conditions under which these bodily transformations occur and how they can influence understandings of human–nonhuman interdependence. We raise the following questions: how are power

relations, social hierarchies, and asymmetrical dependencies contested and negotiated in moments of bodily transformation? What role, for example, do body marking practices play in defining and negotiating boundaries between humans and nonhumans, subjects and objects, persons and nonpersons, and intrinsic or extrinsic agency? How do humans and human bodies become ancestors, spirits, and/or ghosts, and how do nonhumans become or embody humans? What objects and artifacts are involved in these processes of bodily transformation? How do spirits, the dead, and ancestors move across time, space, and bodies? What bodily conditions make a human susceptible or receptive to spirits?

We are interested in contributions that focus on, but need not be restricted to, the following topics:

- The (im-)materialities of spirit bodies (including related spirit geographies and pantheons)
- The histories, performances, and representations of embodied dependencies with regard to spirit bodies
- The multiple, possibly overlapping categories and definitions of spirits, ancestors, ghosts, etc. in relation to humans, with particular reference to their bodily conditions and characteristics
- The embodied experiences of asymmetrical dependencies among humans and spirits and how the sensory experiences of interdependence are negotiated in their interactions
- The mobility and movement of spirits and spirit bodies, e.g., spirits' bodily arrival and departure during rituals, as well as the related techniques and concepts of embodiment, both human and nonhuman
- Spirits' bodily transformation through the consumption of substances, such as offerings and artifacts/objects
- Human and nonhuman out-of-body experiences, altered states of consciousness, and "extra-sensory" human perception of spirits
- The temporal dimensions of im/materiality, in/tangibility, and the liminality of bodies

The interdisciplinary conference will take place on September 29–30, 2022 at the [Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies](#), University of Bonn, Germany. It is organized by Sinah Kloß, Lena Mudders, and Taynã Tagliati ([Research group "Marking Power"](#)).

Please submit your abstracts (200–300 words) and brief biographical information by **September 30, 2021** to [s.kloss@uni-bonn.de](mailto:s.kloss@uni-bonn.de) and [marking-power@dependency.uni-bonn.de](mailto:marking-power@dependency.uni-bonn.de). A limited number of travel bursaries will be available for accepted speakers—please indicate in your application if you wish to apply for a travel bursary. Contributions from scholars across the field of humanities and social sciences are appreciated.