



Materiality (Politics, History, and Culture)

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Throughout history and across social and cultural contexts, most systems of belief—whether religious or secular—have ascribed wisdom to those who see reality as that which transcends the merely material. Yet, as the studies collected here show, the immaterial is not easily separated from the material. Humans are defined, to an extraordinary degree, by their expressions of immaterial ideals through material forms. The essays in *Materiality* explore varied manifestations of materiality from ancient times to the present. In assessing the fundamental role of materiality in shaping humanity, they signal the need to decenter the social within social anthropology in order to make room for the material.

Considering topics as diverse as theology, technology, finance, and art, the contributors—most of whom are anthropologists—examine the many different ways in which materiality has been understood and the consequences of these differences. Their case studies show that the latest forms of financial trading instruments can be compared with the oldest ideals of ancient Egypt, that the promise of software can be compared with an age-old desire for an unmediated relationship to divinity. Whether focusing on the theology of Islamic banking, Australian Aboriginal art, derivatives trading in Japan, or textiles that respond directly to their environment, each essay adds depth and nuance to the project that *Materiality* advances: a profound acknowledgment and rethinking of one of the basic properties of being human.

Contributors. Matthew Engelke, Webb Keane, Susanne Küchler, Bill Maurer, Lynn Meskell, Daniel Miller, Hirokazu Miyazaki, Fred Myers, Christopher Pinney, Michael Rowlands, Nigel Thrift

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