

Of scent and sensibility: embodied ways of seeing in southeast asian cultures

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Abstrak

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One of the goals of this article is to continue the momentum begun by emerging scholarship in theory and practice of writing about visual culture of and in Southeast Asia. I hope to offer culturally sensitive and embodied ways of looking at images and objects as sites/sights of cultural knowledge as further theoretical intervention. The argument put forward in my essay is three fold: first, I critique the prevailing logocentric approach in the field of Southeast Asian Studies and I argue that in a postcolonial, global, and transnational period, it is important to be inclusive of other objects as sites/sights of social, political, and cultural analysis beyond written and oral text. Second, I argue that although it has its own political and theoretical problems, the evolving field of Visual Studies as it is practiced in the prevailing logocentric approach to Southeast Asian Studies. Third, I argue that if one reads these Euro American derived theories of vision and visuality through the lens of what Walter Mignolo calls, then Visual Studies as an evolving field has the potential to offer more nuanced local ways of looking at and understanding objects, vision, and visuality. Last, I point out that unlike in the West where there is an understanding of pure, objective and empirical vision, local Southeast Asian perspectives on objects and visions are more embodied and multi sensorial. I argue that if one is ethically mindful of the local cultural ways of seeing and knowing objects, then the evolving field of Visual Studies offers a much needed intervention to the privileged, lingering logocentric approach to Southeast Asian Studies. Moreover, these alternative methods might help to decolonize method and theory in academic disciplines that were invented during the colonial period.