Call for Papers

Secrecy & Social Practice
from Antiquity to the Present

An Interdisciplinary Graduate Student Conference
hosted by the Religious Studies Department
Brown University
Providence, Rhode Island

The Religious Studies Department at Brown University invites proposals/papers for an interdisciplinary graduate student conference on the theme of “Secrecy and Social Practice.” The conference aims to create a forum for discussion of how the concept of secrecy and related concepts like privacy, exclusivity, mystery, and insider/outsider language informs and is informed by social practices. The department seeks papers from a wide range of scholarly fields in the humanities and social sciences, and also encourages collaborative projects. Disciplinary boundaries can be kept flexible. Possible topics may include, but are not limited to:

Historical Studies:

- How has the idea of secrecy been expressed in (religious) texts or art forms?
- What role can the concept or theme of secrecy play in the configuration, function and purpose of (sacred) space?
- What sorts of things were kept secret in certain traditions (initiation rites, magical spells, messianic secrets …) and what was gained through the practice of secret-keeping?

Cultural Studies:

- Is secrecy a cross-cultural concept? Is it a trans-historical concept?
- How do different cultures or religions deal with secret societies within their traditions?
- How does secrecy function in fundamentalist or extremist religious traditions?

Political Issues:

- How to balance the tension between military/governmental secrecy and a democracy’s requirement of public knowledge?
- Is there a place in democratic discourse for revelatory religions?

Philosophical and Theoretical Issues:

- Can religious revelation or secret knowledge be epistemologically valid?
- Does secrecy play a role in the determination of self and/or mind?
- Why is secrecy/secret-keeping important in certain religious traditions? Is secrecy different from privacy?

Proposals or papers (with abstract not exceeding 250 words) should be submitted as an email attachment (preferably as a PDF document), along with author's/authors’ CV(s), to robyn_walsh@brown.edu with “Brown Conference – Secrecy and Social Practice” in the subject line by August 1, 2007. Responses will be sent out by September 1.