Postsecular Reckonings (Lüneburg, 14.-16. May 25)

Kunstraum at Leuphana Universität, Lüneburg, May 14–16, 2025
Deadline: Dec 1, 2024

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Postsecular Reckonings. Spirituality and Religion in Contemporary Art History and Cultural Studies.

Religious experience persistently marks a range of contemporary art and cultural practices in the Americas. These practices become sites for devotion, the evocation of spirits, or the mourning of the dead. They encompass both religious heritage and spiritual enactment, informing the engagement and struggle with social and political realities through the idioms of contemporary art and culture. In the context of art history and cultural studies at large, these practices unsettle secular paradigms, challenging the assumed abandonment or loss of religion and spirituality in Western modernity (cf. Talal Asad 2018).

The history of catholicism in the Americas poses a paradigmatic case in point. Apart from being an instrument of colonization, the imposition of morals, and the erasure of knowledge, religion also has enabled the transmission of Indigenous and Afro-Diasporic spirituality. Moreover, catholicism has been at play in many struggles for liberation of the poor, women, and queers, most prominently during the 20th Century. Art and cultural practices partake in these processes, not only as visual vehicles for conversion or liberation, but also as means for transmission, mixing, and transformation of religious and cultural conventions. They might undermine clear divides between imposition and survival, modernity and tradition, migration, diaspora, and territorial belonging, demanding sensible approaches that “listen in detail” (Vázquez 2013) to the way these histories sound and feel.

The conference “Postsecular Reckonings” invites researchers and doctoral students stemming from art history, theology and religious studies, anthropology, cultural and performance studies, philosophy, and other related fields, to reflect on the reverberations of religiosity in artistic and cultural practices within disciplines still fastened to their modernist and colonial past. How can our methodologies tune in to the affective, embodied and quotidian modes in which religion informs world- and artmaking in the Americas? How to articulate and potentially transgress the secular legacy of critical theory and cultural studies? And what to make of the countless “residues” of spirituality (Braidotti 2014) that continue to mark and possibly haunt these disciplines?

We welcome presentations addressing, but not limited to, one or more of the following topics:

— devotion, evocation, mourning, and spiritual transmission in contemporary art and culture in the Americas,
— methodological and disciplinary challenges posed by spirituality and religious, cultural prac-

tices, and explorations of writing praxis,
— the spiritual or religious imprint of critical theory, cultural studies, and continental philosophy, and its political implications, for example in the critique of institutional religion and colonialism/-coloniality, as well as critical engagements with these fields' secular legacies,
— liberation, queer, and feminist theologies and their impact on art and culture, or vice versa: anti-colonial, feminist and queer art and cultural practices and their spiritual or religious dimensions.

The history of Christianity and Afro-Diasporic, as well as Indigenous spirituality is of particular interest, but we also invite researchers and PhD students focusing on different, but connected histories and areas.

The conference will open with a keynote lecture by Roberto Strongman (UC Santa Barbara, author of Queering Black Atlantic Religions: Transcorporeality in Candomblé, Santería, and Vodou) with the title "Postsecular Pilgrimages, Imaginary Sources, Dissapointed Returns."

Please submit an abstract of no more than 250 words, along with a CV by December 1st, 2024 to postsecularreckonings@gmail.com. We encourage applicants with no secure funding to apply and to indicate so in your application: We can cover transportation costs and hotel stays during the time of the conference for up to three speakers.

References:
Asad, Talal. Secular Translations. Nation-State, Modern Self, and Calculative Reason. New York: Columbia University Press, 2018.
Braidotti, Rosi. 'Conclusion. The Residual Spirituality in Critical Theory, A Case for Affirmative Postsecular Politics'. In Transformations of Religion and the Public Sphere. Postsecular Publics, edited by Rosi Braidotti et. al. Palgrave Politics of Identity and Citizenship Series. New York, et. al.: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014.
Vázquez, Alexandra T. Listening in Detail. Performances of Cuban Music. Durham, London: Duke University Press, 2013.

Reference:
CFP: Postsecular Reckonings (Lüneburg, 14.-16. May 25). In: ArtHist.net, Oct 4, 2024 (accessed Nov 24, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/42827>.