



Wednesday Seminars

WINTERSEMESTER 2018/19

Birgit Meyer

Figurations and Sensations of the Unseen. 'Idolatry' Beyond the Second Commandment

Montag 21.01.2019, 16.30, HS C, IKSA, NIG, Universitätsstraße 7, 1010 Wien, 4. Stock



Birgit Meyer is professor of Religious Studies at Utrecht University. She has conducted anthropological and historical research on missions and local appropriations of Christianity, Pentecostalism, popular culture and video-films in Ghana. Trained as a cultural anthropologist (PhD in 1995), she studies religion from a material and postcolonial angle, seeking to synthesize grounded fieldwork and theoretical reflection in a multidisciplinary setting. Her research is driven by an urge to make sense of the shifting place and role of religion in our time, and to show that scholarly work in the field of religion is of eminent concern to understanding the shape of our world in the early 21st century. Next to her research in Ghana she has a strong interest in larger conceptual issues regarding the diverse manifestations of religion in past and present, and co-existence of people across and with religious, ethnic and cultural differences. Characteristic of her work is the attention paid to the corporeal, material and political-esthetic dimension of religion from an anthropological perspective. Visual culture and religious images play a strong role in her work.

See also: www.religionmatters.nl

...kommende Termine

30.01.2019 **Lisa Lehner**

Good Diagnostics? Caring for "Good Health" in the Case of Hepatitis C Testing

The unseen is marked as unavailable to direct sight. Subject to manifold restrictions, its representation is a complicated and contested matter. This yields a wide spectrum of stances and habitual attitudes, from appraisals of iconic images that represent the divine, to their dismissal as 'idols', from the embracing of visual signs alluding to the divine without suggesting likeness, to an indifferent attitude towards visual forms. And yet, scholarship in the study of Christianity (and Judaism and Islam) is still indebted to the idea that the interdiction of representational images of the divine is the normative default. Calling attention to the margins of Christianity, where idolatry charges and iconoclasm arise with regard to the cult objects and images in indigenous religious traditions, this lecture argues that it is necessary to open up towards a broader range of possibilities with regard to visual regimes devoted to the figuration of the unseen from a position 'beyond the second commandment'. The first part offers a critique of Bruno Latour's emphasis on the Calvinist interpretation of this commandment, echoed also in the work of W. J. T. Mitchell. The second part turns to the German strand of art history known as Bildwissenschaft, which offers important alternative takes on images and the theologies in which they are embedded. Taking these approaches as a point of departure, the third part studies clashing figurations of the unseen in the export of the notion of idolatry produced by German Protestant missionaries to the Ewe in West Africa. The indigenous deities of the Ewe, which traditionally became tangible through other objects than images, were recast in Protestant religion as idols, and so dismissed as demonic. Having been produced through charges of idolatry, these recast indigenous figures continuously require to be pictured. Even the rejection of images requires a sound understanding of their use and appeal.