

Call for papers

International conference

Is the *spiritual* a valid category for the Humanities? An interdisciplinary debate

In the wake of poststructuralism, critical theory, especially literary theory, has become adept at analyzing and questioning the ideological foundation of speech. Historical and socio-political contexts, race and gender as well as the problematic relationship of language to reality have all been perspectives used to examine literature as discourse. However, such critical stances are helpless to go beyond their own “hermeneutics of suspicion” (Ricoeur 1975) to construct a “positive, restorative interpretation” (Goetz 2011 ; Ricoeur 1965) particularly when it comes to approaching the human being from a non material viewpoint. Researchers are then confronted to a major epistemological question: how should one refer to what eludes rationality and the five senses? What word(s) should be used to characterize the nature of the aesthetic, political or existential quest undertaken in fields as varied as art and literature, sociology, education, environmental philosophy or medical care? Rather than terms like “mystical” or “religious”, laden with connotations and in many respects too reductive to fully express the diversity of human experience, the “spiritual” is a notion that has been gaining epistemological momentum for several decades (Foucault 1979, 2001 ; Hadot 2002, 2008 ; Le Brun 2015 ; Vesperini 2015).

This conference thus wishes to initiate an interdisciplinary debate with a view to examining whether the spiritual might serve as a valid academic category in the humanities.

In medical care, several specialists have listed hundreds of different definitions of the spiritual and still wish to retain the word, despite some semantic confusion (Swinton 2001 ; Pesut *et al.* 2008 ; Swinton & Pattison 2010 ; Jobin 2012). In Indigenous Studies, spirituality is a notion that is helpful to account for the specificity of indigenous relationship to the world and nature (Sefa Dei 2000 ; Goldin Rosenberg 2000). In the field of environmental philosophy and degrowth theory, the spiritual appears as an unavoidable concept to analyze climate crisis and suggest enduring solutions to contemporary challenges (Bourg & Roch 2010 ; Viveret 2012 ; Egger 2012). In philosophical discourse, whether atheistic or deliberately taking distances

from religious traditions, the spiritual is increasingly involved (Ferry 2010 ; Comte-Sponville 2006). While in sociology, it is the object of some debate between the supporters of this category (Wuthnow 2000 ; Heelas & Woodhead 2005) and its opponents (Carrette & King 2005 ; Wood 2009, 2010), others are in favour of a more consensual position (Flanagan & Jupp 2007 ; Ammerman 2013, 2014). Lastly, theology finds itself questioned and rejuvenated both by its dialogue with postmodernity (Mark C. Taylor 1984, 2007 ; Ingraffia 1995 ; Vanhoozer 2003 ; Ward 1997, 2001 ; Nancy 2005, 2010) and by a newfound vitality of belief, understood as spiritual (Schneiders 2005 ; Robert 2009 ; Theobald 2015 ; Moingt 2015).

For contemporary literatures and the arts, based though they are on a break away from the religious, the spiritual is just as topical. At the heart of a greater number of literary studies (Fiddes 2000 ; Tate 2008 ; Wöhrer & Bak 2013 ; Zaugg & Birat 2014), it also conditions one's relationship to signs, images (icons or idols), the invisible and ecstasy. There is a mystical approach of art that takes up existential and spiritual themes (Bordas & Gay-Barbier 2002 ; Cottin 2007 ; Conte & Laval- Jeantet 2008), making philosophers track contemporary signs of the sublime (Saint-Girons 2005) and the sacred (Dupuy 2008 ; Agamben 2016). A certain awed sense of the absolute (Jossua 2000), issues like the immemorial (Thélot 2011), wonder (Boblet 2011) and beauty (Froidefond & Rabaté 2016) among others still haunt literature. This is the reason why Eagleton (2012) casts a critical eye on literary studies that are suspicious of the meaning and experiential effects of forms that have anything to do with the spiritual. French theory, itself, has been shown to harbor a definite spiritual dimension (Caputo 1997). In a western context of declining interest in the religious as well as complex relationships to transcendence (C. Taylor 2007), examining the links between aesthetics and spirituality has become a matter of some emergency (see the collection « Esthétique et spiritualité », E.M.E, 2012 and following).

This international conference is an invitation to explore the ways in which a possible theory of the spiritual might be constructed, in a cultural context marked by "postsecularity" (McClure 2007) and new, postmodern forms of belief (Hungerford 2010). It purports to continue the work of the international and interdisciplinary network "Theorias".

Abstracts (250 words max) **and a short bio/bibliography** should be sent by **January 15th 2017 to the conference website:** <https://theospirit2017.sciencesconf.org/>.

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- Vol. 1 : Decharneux B., Maignant C. & Watthee-Delmotte M. (dir.), *Enjeux identitaires*, 2012 ;
- Vol. 2 : Decharneux B., Maignant C. & Watthee-Delmotte M. (dir.), *La Circulation des modèles en Europe*, 2012 ;
- Vol. 3 : Lambert J. & Lerousseau A., *À l'écoute de la vie intérieure. Approches interdisciplinaires*,

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Vol. 4 : Le Fustec C., Storey F. & J., *Théoriser le spirituel. Approches transdisciplinaires de la spiritualité dans les arts et les sciences*, 2015 ;

Vol. 5 : Watthee-Delmotte M. & O'Connor M., *Enjeux esthétiques et spirituels de la commémoration*, 2016.