

Hassanally Ladha

(Literatures, Cultures & Languages)

UConn Humanities Institute Fellows' Public Talk

February 9, 2016 -- 4:30-6:00 PM

AUSTIN 301

“Hegel and the Postcolonial State: Aesthetics, Subjectivity, and the Idea of Freedom”



Barthélémy Togo, “The Last Supper,” Dakar biennale 2014

Representation of the African continent as a biodegradable garden

Hegel loved Islamic mystical poetry and argued that Goethe’s “Muhammedan” Divan marked the aesthetic undoing of the opposition of East and West and thus the future of art. He further viewed “Africa” as the non-dialectical principle that would fulfill the spiritual promise of the human in the politically mature state at the end of history. If this does not sound like the Hegel we know, it is partly because of the enduring scholarly neglect of his copious lectures on non-Western cultural production. Over the course of his discussions of Oriental and African art, Hegel articulates some of his most foundational positions, including on the unavoidable imbrication of aesthetics and logic and, consequently, on the poetic dimension of all philosophical expression. Given that the entanglement of aesthetics and logic necessarily inflects the fluid form of all concepts, Hegel demands that we patiently work through the contours of his entire system, negotiating throughout his intensely figurative writing, before drawing conclusions on any particular element. Presenting a radical rereading of that system, this talk surfaces the role of the aesthetic in the twin evolution of the subject and the state towards what Hegel insists is the social condition of “freedom.” Gesturing at the relevance of Hegel to contemporary concerns in political theory, the talk concludes by examining the idea of sovereignty in the new Tunisian constitution as an instance of Hegelian evolution towards the elusive “postcolonial” state.

Hassanally Ladha is Assistant Professor of French and Francophone Studies in the Department of Literatures, Cultures, and Languages. He holds a B.A. in English from Yale University and a Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from Princeton University. He is currently a fellow at the University of Connecticut Humanities Institute.