

The study of what Talal Asad calls “formations of the secular” is advancing across the humanities, creating an interdisciplinary subfield referred to as *secularism studies* or *critical secularism studies*. Within religious studies, a “materialist shift” has followed trends in subfields like material culture studies and new materialisms to call attention to the way that religion is made not just by frames of belief, but by bodies, practices, objects, places, and other material things. The proposed workshop will explore how this can be applied to the study of secularism, suggesting that formations of the secular, too, can be understood not just as belief or disbelief, but by attending to their material components.

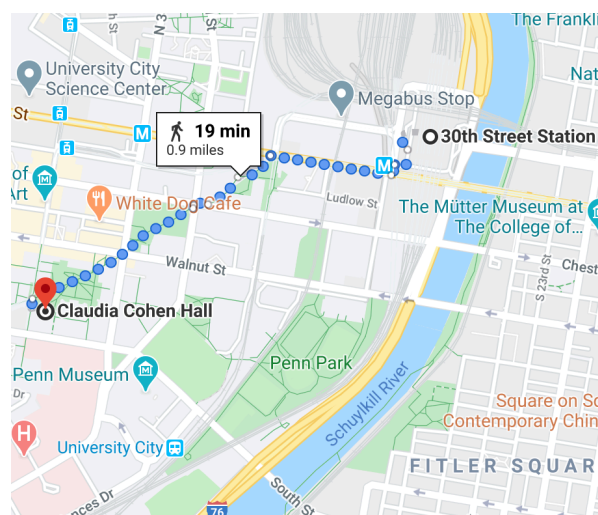
The classic secularization narrative of the mid-20th century envisioned a progressive decline of religion as part of the advance of modernity. Charles Taylor has referred to this as the *subtraction story* view, in which “religion” is a sort of artificial imposition that modifies an essentially neutral intellectual-cultural landscape buried below. Asad points out that the secular is never a clean break from the past, nor is it ever neutral: it draws on an existing repertoire of concepts, narratives, dispositions, bodily practices, and material culture in order to fashion itself. This means that the secular, in its many historically and geographically local iterations, is made, rather than found. A new trend in this area has been to study how these formations can be understood as material.

Secularism is also, as Ann Pellegrini writes, a “structure of feeling” that organizes our bodily reactions and dispositions. And secularism is a full-fledged material culture encompassing objects, clothing, urban space, architecture, monuments, and media. These projects have, to date, been scattered across subfields and institutions. *Material Secularisms* will create a convergence point for these conversations.

## Venues

### 2/27: Claudia Cohen Hall

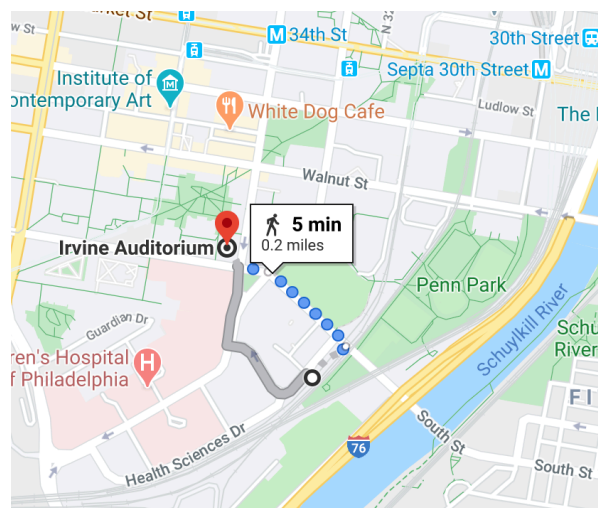
On Thursday we kick off our event with a talk in Cohen 402. Cohen Hall is a 20-minute walk from 30th Street Station (Map 1), or about a 6-minute walk from University City Station (Map 2; Claudia Cohen Hall is just to the west of Irvine Auditorium, on the opposite side of the Perelman Quadrangle).



### 2/28 and 2/29:

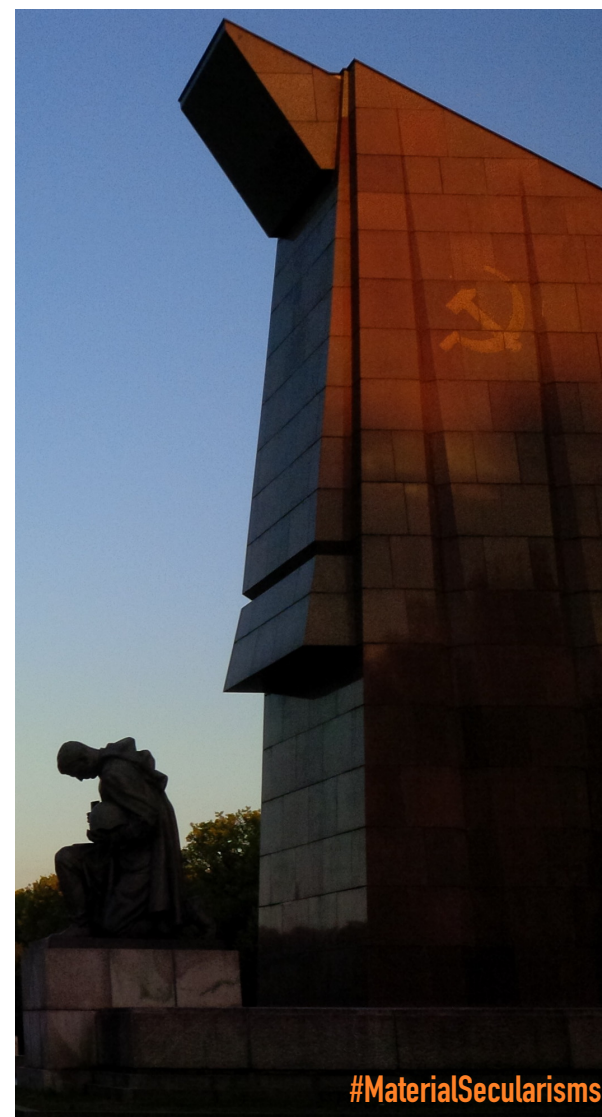
#### Amado Recital Hall, Irvine Auditorium

Irvine Auditorium is a 5-minute walk from University City Station. Enter through the west-facing door.



## Material Secularisms

Can secularism be anything more than books on a shelf?



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## Schedule

### Thursday (Claudia Cohen Hall 402)

#### 7:30 Welcome

Jamal Elias, Penn (RELS chair)

#### 7:35 Introducing Material Secularisms

Donovan Schaefer, Penn

#### 7:45 Research Presentation I: Perspective

Courtney Bender, Columbia University

Moderator: Jolyon Thomas, Penn

### Friday (Irvine Auditorium)

#### All Events Take Place in Amado Recital Hall

#### 10:30 Welcome

Jeffrey Kallberg, Associate Dean of SAS

#### 10:35 Panel I: Nature

Ken Koltun-Fromm, Haverford, presiding

Mayanthi Fernando, UC Santa Cruz

John Modern, Franklin & Marshall

Dana Lloyd, Washington U. St. Louis

#### 12:00 Lunch for all registered participants

#### 13:30 Panel II: Structure/Infrastructure

Lindsay Reckson, Haverford, presiding

Matthew Engelke, Columbia University

Victoria Smolkin, Wesleyan University

Chad Seales, UT Austin

#### 15:00 Coffee Break

#### 15:30 Panel III: Affect

Anthony Petro, Boston University, presiding

Terrence Johnson, Georgetown University

Donovan Schaefer, Penn

Angela Xia, Penn

#### 17:00 Break

#### 17:30 Research Presentation II: Blackness

Anthony Pinn, Rice University

Moderator: Anthea Butler, Penn

#### 19:00 Disband for Dinner

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## Schedule

### Saturday (Irvine Auditorium)

#### All Events Take Place in Amado Recital Hall

#### 10:00 Panel IV: Body

Projit Mukharji, Penn, presiding

Heather Jaber, Penn

Ann Pellegrini, New York University

Jolyon Thomas, Penn

#### 11:30 Lunch for registered participants

#### 13:00 Research Presentation III: Emotion

Monique Scheer, University of Tübingen

Moderator: Donovan Schaefer, Penn

#### 14:15 Coffee Break

#### 14:30 Panel V: Fetish

Vincent Lloyd, Villanova University, presiding

Sharday Mosurinjohn, Queens University

Darryl Wilkinson, Dartmouth College

Angela Zito, New York University

#### 16:00 Closing Remarks

Jolyon Thomas, Penn

#### Dinner recommendations nearby:

Dim Sum House / Han Dynasty / Distrito

+ Excellent options across the bridge in Center City

# DEFAULTVEG

#### Plant-Focused Meals

Conferences can be hard on our planet. We're compensating for this by offering plant-focused lunches and dinners featuring locally sourced ingredients.

#### Evening Entertainment

Conversations don't end just because conference panels do. There are a number of bars close to campus. Try Sansom Street between 34th & 36th Streets.

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## Emphasizing Conversation & Participation

Material Secularisms is a conversation. We have asked panelists to keep presentations to no more than 15 minutes to ensure plenty of time for discussion and audience participation.

We take accessibility seriously, so please be sure to use a microphone when speaking.



## Thanks

We would like to thank the University of Pennsylvania Department of Religious Studies Boardman Fund, the American Academy of Religion Regional Development Grant, the University of Pennsylvania School of Arts and Sciences and the University of Pennsylvania University Research Foundation for the generous funding that enabled this event. Matthew Emile Vaughan of the Mid-Atlantic Region for the American Academy of Religion offered crucial logistical support. Within the Department of Religious Studies, Jamal Elias, Silvia Dunn, Diane Moderski, and Chijioke Azuawusiefe made everything possible.