

CALL FOR PAPERS

“The aesthetics of crossing: experiencing the beyond in Abrahamic traditions”

**INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE
UTRECHT (NL), 19-21 MARCH 2015**

Funded by the European Research Council (ERC)

Hosted by the Dept. of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Utrecht University

Keynotes: Hans Belting, Lindsay Jones, Christian Lange, Birgit Meyer, and Leigh Eric Schmidt

“The aesthetics of crossing: experiencing the beyond in Abrahamic traditions” is a three-day, interdisciplinary, international conference dedicated to studying the manifold ways in which the body experiences and, at times, traverses the perceived divide between the sacred and the profane. Because religious boundaries are not necessarily registered or crossed by the body in its entirety but by one or a number of its senses, the conference is structured around the body’s senses, including the inner, more incorporeal ones such as the faculty of the imagination. The conference seeks: (a) to produce insights, drawn from the study of primary body-related data (texts, images, objects, practices, etc.), into how the body is the vehicle and agent of religious boundary-crossing; (b) to examine how such conceptualizations and uses of the body are both affirmed and contested within religious and secular traditions; and (c) to locate the study of the body and its boundary-crossing potential in the recent disciplinary and political transformations in the study of religion across the Humanities.

“The aesthetics of crossing: experiencing the beyond in Abrahamic traditions” marks the end of a series of scholarly consultations organized within the framework of HHIT (“The here and the hereafter in Islamic traditions”), a four-year research project funded by the European Research Council and hosted at Utrecht University (<http://hhit.wp.hum.uu.nl/>). HHIT has been primarily invested in studying Muslim cosmologies and imaginaries, seeking to trace and locate the various boundaries, often unstable and permeable, that divide this world from the otherworld in a variety of Islamic religious discourses and practices. This conference seeks to broaden the work of HHIT in several directions, and to stimulate discussion across disciplines such as Islamic Studies, Religious Studies, Anthropology, Literature, History of Art, and others.

PAPER PROPOSALS (< 500 WORDS) ARE SOLICITED BY 1ST SEPTEMBER, 2014, IN THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

Session I: Visual Crossings

Panel 1: *Representations of the unseen*. Papers might examine: the use of art and architecture in the realization of the sacred; the use, abuse, and contestation of images of prophets and prophetic figures in a variety of traditions; etc.

Panel 2: *Occlusion and occultation*. Papers might examine: material veiling practices and the scopic régimes to which they belong; the evil eye and notions of being ‘struck’ by the unseen; processes of moving into occultation; the occultation of saints, Imams; etc.

Session II: Olfactory Crossings

Panel 3: *Tasting*. Papers might examine: the use of food in religious law and ritual,

particularly as it betokens a holy communion or offers a foretaste of the otherworld; tasting as a metaphor in mystical traditions; etc.

Panel 4: *Smelling*. Papers might examine: smells and perfume in religious traditions and the olfactory régimes in which they are embedded; in particular, the smell of sacred bodies, e.g. saints, martyrs, relics, and how are invoked to establish presence; bad breath (halitosis) and ascetic 'problems' with smells; etc.

Session III: Auditory Crossings

Panel 5: *Music*. Papers might examine: sacred music and its use in ritual, particularly as a practice that invokes the boundary-crossing properties of sound as a facilitator of other types of crossings (e.g. bodily, territorial, cosmological); singing and listening practices, and the religious reflections that buttress and accompany these practices; etc.

Panel 6: *Hearing across the divide*. Papers might examine: the oral/aural dimension of revelation as it pertains to boundary crossing; the hearing of voices from the beyond; the voice of god[s] and angels; criticized, thwarted and failed attempts to listen in to the otherworld; etc.

Session IV: Tactile Crossings

Panel 7: *Touching the living, touching the dead*. Papers might examine the boundary-crossing dimensions of: caressing, kissing, and having sex; touching living saints; touching dead bodies and relics; also, the etiquettes of touching the living and the dead, and theories about the transmission of grace by touching; etc.

Panel 8: *Touching things*. Papers might examine: the touching of cenotaphs and mausolea; the touching of sacred, 'otherworldly' plants, minerals, or artifacts; etc.

Session V: Crossings by the Inner Senses

Panel 9: *Imagination*. Papers might examine: definitions of the faculty of imagination as a sense between the sensible and intelligible, in particular as the imagination is invoked and made to be operative in a) experiences of the beyond, and b) the construction of imagined/imaginable worlds; etc.

Panel 10: *Intellect*. Papers might examine: examples of intellectual otherworlds and afterlives and the concurrent claims to intellectual crossings; the challenge contained in such cosmologies to sensational religious practices and discourses; theories of prophecy and reason that accompany and derive from intellectualist conceptions of religious boundary-crossing; etc.

Panel 11: *Inner vision*. Papers might examine: the nature and function of the inner eye; illumination and light as a metaphor for spiritual transformation; the idea of a *sensus numinis* as it pertains to boundary crossing; etc.

Panel 12: *Locatedness*. Papers might examine: the 'sense' of religious architecture and religious mapping of the world; the 'sense' of locatedness, orientation, and balance in religious cosmologies; etc.

Please send title and paper proposals (< 500 words) to the conference organizers, Christian Lange (Utrecht University) and Simon O'Meara (SOAS, London):
aestheticsofcrossing[at]gmail.com

A number of travel grants are available for speakers. Please indicate when submitting your proposal whether you think you may need financial assistance in order to attend the conference.