**“How Religion Becomes Effective” –**

**Aesthetics as a Connective Concept for the Study of Religion**

**International conference, University of Groningen, the Netherlands**

**6, 7 and 8 March 2013**

**Cooperation between: Dept. of Comparative and Historical Study of Religion (Groningen), Dept. of Religious Studies and Theology (Utrecht) & Arbeitskreis Religionsästhetik of the German Association for the Study of Religion (DVRW)**

**Outline of the Conference Topic**

Over the past few decades, the role of the body and the senses has become a crucial objective within the study of religion, striving to overcome biased categories, which confined religion either to texts and abstract beliefs, or to an indisputable *sui generis* mode of experience. A critically revised understanding of *aesthetics* has been introduced, referring to the meaning of sensory perception (*aisthesis*) rather than to a philosophy of art. As an analytical framework, the focus on perception sheds light on the many ways in which religion becomes ‘effective’, on an individual as well as a societal level. Related approaches start from the question how religion stimulates and governs the body and the senses, how this is linked to meaning-making and cultural symbolic systems, and, in turn, how religious world making comes to influence social aesthetics in a larger culture.

Seeing religion as a multi-facetted cultural phenomenon, which creates convincing and ‘immediate’ perceptions of reality, it is obvious that diverse approaches are necessary to scrutinize its dimensions. Instead of opposing historical, sensory, or interpretive approaches, it should be considered whether aesthetics could serve as a “connective concept” in several ways: by allowing us to recognize a broader range of sources and media by which religions create a ‘panorama of perception’; by offering a link between perception and the history of aesthetic forms, and between individual practice and cultural ideologies; by enabling scholars to question dualist notions of body and mind, or spirit and matter; and by paving the way to critically engaging diverse academic knowledge cultures – not least the polarized debate on *cognition and culture* – and claims regarding how we can and how we should understand religion.

The main goal of this conference is to exchange approaches, material, and concepts and to explore the potential of an aesthetic approach for adequately describing religion as a sensory and mediated practice. A preliminary version of the conference program can be found on the following pages.

Format

The format of the conference aims at intensive exchange and developing the aesthetic approach to religion. Every speaker has 20 minutes, plus ten minutes for direct questions and remarks. Preferably, your papers are shorter rather than longer than 20 minutes, and the discussions will benefit from focusing on the conference topic. Afterwards, we will have time for a plenary discussion about each unit. In the program, you will find the function of the ‘observer’. Since we do not have time for elaborate responses, we think this to be a good way of communicating what has happened in the parallel sessions, and of creating a reflective and dynamic way of communication.

Program & Schedule

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Wednesday, 6.3.2013

15.00 – 16.00 Registration and Coffee

16.00 – 17.00 Opening and Introduction:

With

Alexandra Grieser:

“On the Connectivity of Aesthetics”

Welcome: Prof. K. von Stuckrad

17.00 – 17.30: Reception

17.30 – 19.00 Podium Discussion:

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| **A Matter of Perception –**  **The History of the Aesthetic Approach and the Groningen Tradition** |
| With  **Hans G. Kippenberg (Bremen) - Christoph Uehlinger (Zurich)** - **Birgit Meyer (Utrecht)**  The emergence of an aesthetic approach to religion is part and parcel of the historical developments within the academic study of religion. In the mid-eighties, Hans G. Kippenberg co-founded the journal *Visible Religion*, and he claimed that we need an approach to religion accounting of visual representations in the same elaborate way, as we knew it from text hermeneutics. Christoph Uehlinger critically reviewed and commented on this “Groningen tradition”, and explained why it came ‘too soon’, in a sense, for being recognized as a new direction in the Study of Religion(s). Since then, much has developed: the “aesthetics of religion” have been integrated in a programmatic outline of the cultural study of religion, cognition, the body and *all* the senses – not just vision – seem to be a hot topic in the field, and Birgit Meyer entered the scene with the concept of “aesthetic formations” and another pioneering journal – *Material Religion* – which is successfully dedicated to these approaches.  By interlacing the historical with the current situation, as well as the “Groningen case” with a broader view on the academic landscape, the three scholars will give insights into the changes of sources, methods, and theories in the field of the study of religion, and will also discuss whether we can speak of the career of a new perspective on religion. |

19.30 Conference Dinner

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**Thursday, 7.3.2013**

9.00 – 10.30 Panel I: Fields and Topics

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| Session A; Observer: Kim Knibbe  Chair: Maruska Svasek Court Room | Session B; Observer: Peter J. Bräunlein  Chair: Ronit Nikolsky Room 123 |
| **Adrian Hermann**  “Screening *Father of Lights* (2012): A Contem-porary US Charismatic Christian Documentary Film, its Audiences and the Emergence of a Christian Documentary Aesthetics”  **Almut-Barbara Renger**  "Myth & Religion in German Expressionism: Aesthetics and Politics."  **Marleen de Witte**  “Touch. Or:  *how the Holy Spirit becomes effective*” | **Fiona Magowan**  “Singing the Jesus Totem: Exploring a spiritual aesthetics of convergence and counterpoint in Northern Australia”  **Hubert Mohr**  “Standing, not Moving” – the Hieratic as a Key Term of an Anthropologically based Aesthetics of Religion”  **Laura Feldt** “Literary Aesthetics in Religious Mediation: discussing an aesthetic approach to literary-religious texts” |

10.30 - 10.45 **Coffee**

10.45 -11.45 **Panel II: History and Politics**

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| Session A; Observer: Niklaus Largier  Chair: Sebastian Schüler Court Room | Session B; Observer: Ronit Nikolsky  Chair: Annet van der Meer Room 123 |
| **Ulrike Brunotte**  “The Performative Knowledge of Ecstasy and Emotion. Jane E. Harrison’s (1850-1928) Early Contestations to the Textual Paradigm in Religious Studies”  **Johannes Quack**  "Aesthetics and Politics of Dead Bodies: Reflections on Non-religious Material Culture” | **Christoph Auffarth**  “What Does a Reformed City Look Like? –  Changes in Visible Religion after the Reformation in Bremen”  **Richard McGregor**  Islamic Reform and the Transformation of Objects – 'mahmals' and museums in Egypt |

12.00 – 13.00 **Observer’s report, discussion (Plenary)**

(Chair: Alexandra Grieser)

13.00 -14.00 **Lunch**

14.00 -15.30 **Panel III: Comparison & Transfer** (all following sessions: Court Room)

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| Observer: Manuel Vasquez  Chair: Katharina Wilkens |
| **Tatjana Schönwälder-Kuntze**  “Do Bodies Function Like *schemata*? Comparing Kant’s Concept of *schema* to Butler’s Concept of *Bodies*”  **Peter J. Bräunlein**  “Aesthetics of Pain”  **Annette Wilke**  “Moving Religion by Sound: Sanskrit Hinduism and the European History of Religion” |

15.30- 16.00 **Coffee**

16.00 – 17.30 **Observer’s report, discussion**

(Chair: Jens Kugele)

19.00 **Dinner**

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**Friday, 8.3.2013**

9.15 –10.45 **Panel IV: Concepts & Theories**

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| Observer: Birgit Meyer; Barend van Heusden  Chair: Adrian Hermann |
| **Jay Johnston**  “Esoteric Aesthetics: Locating an Intersubjective Methodology”  **Niklaus Largier**  “Below the Horizon of Meaning: Figuration, Disfiguration, Transfiguration”  **Maruska Svasek**  “Aestheticisation: Merging and Clashing Formations of Potentiality and Effect” |

10.45 – 11.00: **Coffee**

11.00 – 12.00 **Panel VI:** **Concepts & Theories**

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| Observer: Birgit Meyer; Barend van Heusden  Chair: Peter J. Bräunlein |
| **Sebastian Schüler**  “*Homo Efferveszensis*? Aesthetic Arousal, Embodied Coordination and Social Dynamics in Collective Rituals”  **Manuel A. Vasquez**  "Religion in the Flesh: Non-Reductive Materialism and the Aesthetics of Religion." |

12.00 – 13.00 Observer’s report; Final Discussion; Prospects

(Chair: Sebastian Schüler, Alexandra Grieser)

13.00 **Goodbye &** **Lunch**