



University  
of Glasgow

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The 18th Biennial Conference of the International Society for  
**Religion, Literature and Culture**

*lines in  
sand*

*borders, conflicts and transitions*

**9th – 11th September 2016**

*University of Glasgow*

*Keynote Speakers*

Prof Catherine Keller, Drew University

Prof Tim Ingold, University of Aberdeen

[www.linesinsand2016.wordpress.com](http://www.linesinsand2016.wordpress.com)

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Religion, Literature and Culture

# **Lines in Sand**

## **Borders, Conflicts and Transitions in Religion, Literature and Culture**

University of Glasgow, 9th-11th September 2016.

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### **Keynote Speakers**

**Catherine Keller, Drew University. Author of *On The Mystery: Discerning God in Process*, *Cloud of the Impossible* and *Face of the Deep: A Theology of Becoming*.**

**Tim Ingold: University of Aberdeen. Author of *Lines: A Brief History*, *Being Alive* and *The Perception of the Environment*.**

The interdisciplinary study of religion, literature and culture demands living on the boundaries, constructing provisional positions, and questioning fixed and dogmatic attitudes. This is necessarily a political exercise, as well as an intellectual and spiritual one. It makes challenging demands upon scholarship, creativity and imagination. It calls us to transformative action.

Voices in literature and theology are now being heard from many different and divergent cultural situations. We are members of a global community in which the arts function as important sites for articulating the cost of conflicts and imagining transformed futures. The theme of this conference, 'Lines in Sand' recalls the importance of our provisional attempts to inscribe hope and resistance in an era of conflict, anxiety and environmental destruction.

In this age of tension between religions and cultures in such places as Iraq and Syria, this conference also prompts a renewed exploration of desert spirituality as a way forward in addressing issues of

religious and racial conflict, ecological crisis, and economic instability. In recognition of the Scottish context of this Glasgow conference, we also invite discussion of the Celtic tradition's relocation of desert spirituality to these islands. The subject of borderlands also speaks to the current debates concerning citizenship in Scotland and around the world, in the twin context of globalization on one hand, and renewed nationalisms on the other.

Topics inspired by the 'Lines in Sand' theme may include:

- interdisciplinary scholarship in theology and the arts as 'life on the borders'
- cross-cultural and inter-religious engagement in literature, theology and the arts
- creative and theological responses to conflict and division
- literary and artistic explorations of the asceticism and aesthetics of desert spirituality
- responses in literature and theology to environmental crises
- reclaiming the boundaries of national and cultural identity in religion, literature and the arts
- sexuality and gender as borderline positions

## Call for Papers

All enquiries and proposals (of no more than 300 words) should be emailed to the convenors of the individual panels before Monday 18th April 2016.

### Biblical Studies

Convenor: Mette Bundvad ([mbu@teol.ku.dk](mailto:mbu@teol.ku.dk))

The Biblical Studies panel welcomes 15-minute papers that reflect on issues related to transition, migration, and power in the context of the Bible and its reception. The writers and interpreters of biblical texts participate in an ongoing construction and reimagining of communities that perceive themselves as displaced, exiled or journeying. We encourage papers that focus on any aspect of this process.

We also encourage proposals that look at borders in the context of communities who produce and interpret biblical texts. For example, how may we think about the borders of such communities? How do the members of specific interpretive groups define themselves as a group and in relation to outsiders? How are such borders reinforced or challenged in the artistic, religious and political reception of a group's textual production? Similarly, papers may explore borders between interpretive communities. How do these communities conceptualize and describe the distance between themselves and other communities, either along a historical axis or in their contemporary context? And what happens to an interpretive group or tradition as it migrates – geographically, from one community to another, or from one literary or artistic medium to another?



## Continental Philosophy and Religion

Convenors: Daniel Whistler ([Daniel.Whistler@liv.ac.uk](mailto:Daniel.Whistler@liv.ac.uk)) and Andrew Hass ([andrew.hass@stir.ac.uk](mailto:andrew.hass@stir.ac.uk))

This panel seeks proposals for 20-minute papers. The philosophical question of the line, as border, boundary, or threshold, yields to questions of spacing and placing, to limits and finitude, which in turn lead to questions of discernibility, distinction and difference, and of traversal, transgression, and transcendence. A 'line in the sand' brings even further issues: impermanence and permeability, or ethically, confrontation and provisionality. Continental philosophy offers many 'lines to this line, and this panel invites papers to explore the manifold lines that can be drawn, and that necessarily intersect with art (the literally drawn line), with literature (the fictional line), with religion (the sacred line) and/or with culture (the produced line), in a manner that shows how any proper philosophical discussion of the line will always cross disciplinary lines.

## Dialogue

Convenor Marije Altorf ([marije.altorf@stmarys.ac.uk](mailto:marije.altorf@stmarys.ac.uk))

The art of dialogue can create a space in which borders can be crossed, and fixed identities and answers challenged. Dialogues often take place at the border, just before or after a conflict, or before or after a situation in which no communication was possible. Dialogues can be border experiences themselves, determining what can and what cannot be said.

Dialogues create concrete examples of such border crossings and border experiences. In *Teaching to Transgress* bell hooks writes:

It is fashionable these days, when 'difference' is a hot topic in progressive circles, to talk about 'hybridity' and 'border crossing', but we often have no concrete examples of individuals who actually occupy different locations within structures, sharing ideas with one another, mapping out terrains of commonality, connection, and shared concern with teaching practices. (1994, pp. 129-30)

This panel invites 20-minute papers that present and reflect on a practice of dialogue at the border: dialogues in which borders are transgressed, and dialogues *in* or *as* border experiences.

## Ecotheologies: Culture, Nature and Religion

Convenors: Alexandra Campbell ([a.campbell.3@research.gla.ac.uk](mailto:a.campbell.3@research.gla.ac.uk)) and Anna Fisk ([anna.fisk@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:anna.fisk@glasgow.ac.uk))

This panel seeks contributions which address concerns regarding the relationship between religious and spiritual worldviews and the environment.

The burgeoning field of the 'environmental humanities' explores cultural expressions of the relation between the human and more-than-human world, including ethical and political questions of how one 'may live in this world and do, if not harm, then the absolute minimum of harm' (John Burnside, *A Science of Belonging*).

Suggested areas of discussion may include:

- Creative and theological responses to environmental crises.
- Nature-based spiritualities - both traditional/indigenous and modern western (e.g. contemporary Paganism, Dark Green Religion)
- Earth-centred discourses that may be implicitly religious, such as Gaia theory and deep ecology.
- Nature as a source of nourishment, restoration and wellbeing.
- Discourses of environmental dystopia and apocalypse.
- Ecological compassion, guardianship, ethics and care.
- Ecocritical discussions of dwelling and enchantment
- Theological implications of the recent 'material turn' in critical theory (such as 'new animism', posthumanism and 'new materialism')

We welcome proposals for both individual 20-minute papers and roundtable discussions, emailed along with a brief author bio.

## Gender

Convenor: tbc

This panel welcomes proposals for 20-minute papers relating to the conference theme and the subject of gender, sexuality and feminism in terms of religion and culture. Topics may include, for example:

- gender and religion in the creative arts
- sexuality and gender as borderline positions
- creative and theological responses to the gendered impact of conflict and climate change
- feminist and queer readings in literature and theology
- intersectional feminisms in terms of borders and conflicts
- lines of transition in the feminist 'waves'
- gendered interpretations of the woman taken in adultery (John 8:1-11)
- 'desert mothers' – desert spirituality and gender

Please send proposals to Anna Fisk ([anna.fisk@glasgow.ac.uk](mailto:anna.fisk@glasgow.ac.uk)).

## Judaism

Convenor: Marianne Schleicher ([ms@cas.au.dk](mailto:ms@cas.au.dk))

This panel welcomes proposals for 20-minute papers. With reference to 'desert spirituality' as a conference theme, the Judaism panel wants to counter its Christian bias and its world-renouncing understanding of asceticism as well as point to the completely different connotations that 'desert' has as literary imagery in Jewish religion, literature, and culture after two millennia of exile. Up against Jewish history, 'desert' signifies *inter alia* complex experiences in the past as well as visions of what the future should - or more likely, should not - look like. Accordingly, the Judaism panel calls for papers willing to reflect on

- what the literary imagery of 'desert' may mean in a Jewish context?
- how past 'desert' experiences have contributed to the uniqueness of Jewish religion, literature, and culture, its practices, theologies, and ethics?
- why past 'desert' experiences have convinced some Jews to invest in diasporic Judaism in spite of the possibility since 1948 for Jews to live in a Jewish nation-state?
- whether world-renouncing practices of asceticism have ever been or could be compatible with past, present or future versions of Jewish religion?

## Literature

Convenors: Jeff Keuss ([keussj@spu.edu](mailto:keussj@spu.edu)) and Mark Knight ([mark.knight@utoronto.ca](mailto:mark.knight@utoronto.ca))

Papers on literature and any topic inspired by the conference theme are invited. Proposals might consider (but are not limited to):

- Literary forms and genres
- Hybridity, intertextuality, conversation, dialogism
- The ways in which literary texts show the porosity of identity categories (sexuality, nationality, race, class, religion, etc.)
- The role of borders in literary studies as a discipline (e.g. between different literary fields, and between literature and other disciplines)
- Literary explorations of the space between religion and the secular.
- Ecocriticism and/or the relationship between literature and environment
- Creative-Criticism and the relationship between literary criticism and creative writing.
- Literary responses to John 8:1-11.
- The ethics of reading.

Although we anticipate that most of the proposals will be in the form of single 20-minute papers that we subsequently group into panels, we are also open to receiving pre-formed panel proposals. These should include individual proposals and CVs, along with a panel title and a 250-word description of the panel.

# Lost in Translation: Globalization, Secularization, and the Issue of the Untranslatable

Convenors: Laurens ten Kate ([rippen-tenkate@planet.nl](mailto:rippen-tenkate@planet.nl)), Bart Philipsen ([bart.philipsen@arts.kuleuven.be](mailto:bart.philipsen@arts.kuleuven.be)) and Aukje van Rooden ([a.vanRooden@uva.nl](mailto:a.vanRooden@uva.nl))

One of the main approaches to globalization points to an increasingly unified world, and to a humanity at last in an intimate state of contact with itself. This world is where attachment is no longer limited to ethnic affiliation, religious tradition or geographical proximity, and where it has been displaced onto a universal subject: the global human community.

Moreover, this celebration of global belonging is motivated by a self-fulfilling process of secularization, relying on the idea that a non- or post-religious mode of existence has become the only possible way to live in the world.

In this panel we seek to explore the ways in which this discourse of global, secular belonging is put under pressure by the issue of the *untranslatable*. In the mutual exposure of traditions, languages and worldviews a space of the untranslatable (Cassin, Apter) is created. In this interstitial space the borders, conflicts and transitions between our languages and imaginaries are reaffirmed as well as problematized, opening up new, untranslatable modes of co-existence, of 'being-in-the-world' (Heidegger) or 'being-in-common' (Nancy).

All proposals for 20-minute papers that address the overall panel theme from a philosophical, theological or literary theory perspective are welcome!

## Material Religion

Convenor: S. Brent Plate ([splate@hamilton.edu](mailto:splate@hamilton.edu))

Objects and media, bodies and senses, books and symbols, spaces and times, all operate together to shape religious worlds. Materiality stands at the heart of religious life. We are interested in papers or panels that explore some of these dimensions. In keeping with the conference theme, we are especially interested in thinking about the transformation of objects and bodies as they cross cultural and political borders, or occupy different sites. This includes transitions from ritual settings to museums, and libraries to sanctuaries. We are also interested in receiving proposals on the 'material texts', and will be arranging a session in conjunction with the University of Glasgow Library Special Collections.

## Music

Convenor: Nils Holger Petersen ([nhp@teol.ku.dk](mailto:nhp@teol.ku.dk))

While critical and imaginative voices in literature and theology are frequently raised in various cultural situations, music has a different cultural position. Still, music has played significant roles in historical crises and changes, for instance in connection with religious reform movements. The question, however, is what kind of contribution music can give? Can music help to inscribe hope and resistance? Is music solely an aesthetic frame around 'real' discursive contents? Does music – in its own ways – do something or have something to 'say' beyond the boundaries of discursivity?

The music panel seeks to explore the potential roles of music in religious, existential and political contexts in historical as well as present-day cultures. Which roles have music practices historically fulfilled and which roles may it fulfil in modern crises, transitions and conditions? The music panel welcomes musical contributions in connection with academic discussion as well as paper presentations of a paper on relevant topics.

## Postcolonial Literature

Convenors: Helga Ramsey-Kurz ([helga.Ramsey-Kurz@uibk.ac.at](mailto:helga.Ramsey-Kurz@uibk.ac.at)), Cheryl Stobie ([StobieC@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:StobieC@ukzn.ac.za)) and Ileana Dimitriu ([DIMITRIU@ukzn.ac.za](mailto:DIMITRIU@ukzn.ac.za))

Postcolonial discourse is traditionally concerned with identities in states of liminality. One of its key objects has always been to give visibility to human existences on the periphery of political and economic empires and to restore their histories by validating their cultures, notably their literatures and belief systems.

In recent years, postcolonial discussions of the marginalised Other and its 'place/space' in the world have changed under the impact of a growing interest in the characteristic elasticity and porosity of borders as a factor enforcing the fluidity of identities manifest especially when borders are imposed, transgressed, or demolished in the wake of colonial conquest, postcolonial assimilation, or anti-colonial rebellion.

Contributors to this panel are invited to respond to literary and other artistic explorations of conflicts ensuing from impositions and contestations of borders by colonialist or anti-colonial forces. Contributions may also engage with imaginative deconstructions of the very notion of borders, and constructions of trans-border relations founded on an ethics sufficiently future-oriented to facilitate emancipation from the colonial past and forge a condition truly post-colonial.

Participants in this panel will be encouraged to circulate their principal ideas and some questions before the conference to better plan the discussion of their 15-20 minute presentations.



## Religion and Modernity

Convenor: Erik Borgman ([e.p.n.m.borgman@tilburguniversity.edu](mailto:e.p.n.m.borgman@tilburguniversity.edu))

It could be argued that the intellectual project of modernity is characterized by its focus on the proper respect for the boundaries between the disciplines, approaches, and logics.

In theology in particular this is played out as a focus on the proper distinction between 'faith' and 'reason', 'religious' and 'secular'. At the same time, literary modernism explicitly tried to blur the distinctions between literary genres, types of writing, high and low culture etc. There were attempts to provide a new plausibility for faith and theology making use of strategies related to modernist literature.

20-minute papers on the attempt to make establish clear distinctions and papers on famous or less known cases of blurring them are welcome.

## Religious and Inter-Religious Studies

Convenor: Alana M. Vincent ([alana.vincent@gmail.com](mailto:alana.vincent@gmail.com))

The purpose of this panel is to consider the boundaries between religious systems, and between religion and non-religion. What theoretical and/or methodological challenges arise from considering these boundaries as porous and malleable? How does the lived reality of multiple religious belonging prompt alterations to the theological imaginary (as materialised in art and literature)? What role does heterodoxy play in the construction, self-understanding, and portrayal of religious communities?

In addition to the traditional 20-minute paper session, this panel will also host a roundtable discussion on the above questions. Potential participants are asked to submit a brief statement of their interest in the topic along with a short list of relevant publications.

## Theological Humanism

Convenor: Daniel Boscaljon ([daniel-boscaljon@uiowa.edu](mailto:daniel-boscaljon@uiowa.edu))

This year, the Theological Humanism panel will focus on 'Lines' of fragility, impermanence, and transitoriness in three general ways:

1. Examine a theological anthropology centered on fragility. What lines in the sand usefully determine human identities in secular situations, and how does the 'god' alter these boundaries? How might using 'lines in the sand' as a model of (post) secular human identity allow an openness to encounters with theophanies? We welcome works that build on Klemm, Schweiker, Nancy, Ricoeur, Kearny, Vattimo, Milbank, and Marion to address the stable fragility of contemporary life.

2. Examine 'lines' through liminal art forms or processes. Papers might show how such temporary, fragile art presents a model for future theologies. Alternatively, papers may use an extant theological framework to expose the theological depth of this work. Whether a model of god, human, or art, these papers would offer interdisciplinary explorations of cultural theology.

3. Examine political theological humanism by discussing problems of injustice and borders that haunt our contemporary world. Whether this invokes the political dimension of ecology, economics, enframing, or estrangement, we such paper would reveal how theological humanism provides a unique possibility for resolving such problems.

## Visual Arts

Convener: Aaron Rosen ([aaron.rosen@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:aaron.rosen@kcl.ac.uk))

This session takes the conference title both literally and figuratively. Many modern artists have used earth—and sand specifically—as a medium. In *When Faith Moves Mountains* (2002), Francis Alÿs asked hundreds of volunteers to move a giant sand dune in Peru. James Turrell has spent decades converting a cinder cone in the Arizona desert into an observatory and contemplative space.

Building upon such examples, presenters may wish to explore connections between environmental art and religion. Presenters are also welcome to consider boundaries in other ways. As Homi Bhabha recognizes, borders can be oppressive, but they can also be sites of creativity, in which people act out their 'hybridity'.

Case studies are welcome from any period or region that investigate the ways artists test and transgress religious and cultural boundaries. This session welcomes presentations from practicing artists as well as proposals for panel discussions (e.g. artist, curator, theologian).

All enquiries and proposals (of no more than 300 words) should be emailed to the convenors of the individual panels before **Monday 18th April 2016**.

For other enquiries and up-to-date information regarding this conference, see [www.linesinsand2016.wordpress.com](http://www.linesinsand2016.wordpress.com)