CALL FOR PAPERS
Deadline: 1 December 2012
Conference
Esthetics and Spirituality: Places of Interiority
Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium
16 – 17 – 18 May 2013

In the contemporary Western European world traditional, institutionalized religions are losing ground, while alternative religions, literature and the arts, film and media, as well as commercial enterprises are offering alternatives. Old concepts, symbols and rituals are translated into new forms. This is a recurrent phenomenon: as sensitivities change throughout the ages, the ways to express this changed “interiority” change and result in new manifestations of spirituality.

This multi- and interdisciplinary Conference on Aesthetics and Spirituality looks at how, both in the past and the present, people devise(d) new ways of conceiving and manifesting interiority. In order to look at the forms “interiority” has received throughout the ages we use different approaches: literature, cultural studies, theology, art (iconography/iconology), history (of ideas) and architecture, anthropology, political sciences/sociology, psychology, philosophy...

How do exteriority and interiority relate? What does it mean to be in a place, to be at home in the world or with oneself (cf Pierre Nora, Les lieux de mémoire)? How can urban planning, public and private buildings, furniture and other material things, clothes, prescribed attitudes, etc. be conducive to interiorization (conscious or unconscious reflections, contemplation)? Or, conversely, how can material factors repress interiority (cf repressive political systems)? In order to imagine a topology of interiority that would draw on an inter-disciplinary field of studies and research we invite papers on the different kinds of language which translate outside to inside and vice versa.

If interiority is a question of presence and orientation we need to look at

(a) Bodily expressions: a religious community prescribed a certain body language which could bring about a spirituality (cf. nineteenth-century feminine congregations focusing on nursing, weaving and embroidering); manifold forms of biblical spirituality (Schneider et al) inspire the body, while psychology of religion and psychoanalysis develop ways of reading religious bodies (Vergote, Lacan, Vasse, Moyaert et al).

(b) Expressions through things, images (iconology), words:
-changes in the attitude to relics, books, icons, devotional cards, rosaries, ...
-different links between theology, art and literature produce different forms: the “bondieuserie” in France (1850s) differed from Pre-Raphaelite depictions of the divine (cited by Dickens), or from the Pilgrim’s Movement in Flanders; after the Great War Benedicite spirituality was revived, while Franciscan spirituality brought a new attention for nature and animals in literature; 21st-century ecocriticism brings a new attitude to representations of nature, as do gender studies to aspects of spirituality ...

(c) Changes in Ritual, as a means to link physical and metaphorical aspects of experience: which forms of ritual are depicted, developed, in contemporary literature, to mark forgiveness, reconciliation, or other transitions (to adulthood, married life, divorce, healing from sickness, death,...) Which theories of performativity are used in liturgy these days? Which kind of poetics are used in contemporary prayer? How do contemporary political symbols (fail to) develop? (Cf. prevalence of Christian symbols in commemorations of British army casualties et al). Can ritual help in conflict situations, and how are new rituals validated? How do religious institutions relate to the secularization?

(d) Contributions relating to or focusing on Irish topics will be especially welcomed.
Are Celtic symbols still known, used, adapted? How does Irish urbanization, architecture, make space for interiority? How is “interiority” conceived at all in contemporary art and philosophy? Which places,
moments, figures, phenomena, concepts, does contemporary film, drama, poetry, fiction, art, hold in special reverence? Does nature (stone, plant, animal) still harbour something sacred, and if so, how? Do angels still figure?
Are there still references to the Jewish, Greek, Christian stories? Is twentieth-century and contemporary art, literature and film reacting or indifferent to this tradition, does it translate archaic symbols (animals and trees, food and drink, textile and books, home and travel, …) into new forms, or does it divest these old icons of their symbolism?

The conference is hosted by the KU Leuven, the Faculties of the Arts, Theology and KADOC (Interfaculty Institute of the KU Leuven for Documentation and Research for Religion, Culture and Society) in cooperation with the Leuven Centre for Irish Studies (LCIS). It will take place in the newly refurbished Irish college in Leuven (the Leuven Institute for Ireland in Europe). The Scientific Committee consists of Barbara Baert (KU Leuven, Arts), Reimund Bieringer (KU Leuven, Theology), Ralph De Koninck (Université Catholique de Louvain, Arts), Jan De Maeyer (KADOC, KU Leuven, History/Heritage), Borbala Farago (Central European University Budapest, Gender Studies), Veerle Fraeters (U Antwerpen, Literature), Christine Göttler (Universität Bern, Arts), Hedwig Schwall (KU Leuven/Kortrijk, Literature), Paul Vandenbroeck (KU Leuven/Anthropology/Social sciences), Henrik von Aachen (University of Bergen, Norway, Arts)

Papers should not exceed 2500-3000 words (20 minutes’ delivery). Proposals for papers (250 words) and a short biography should be sent by e-mail to Hedwig Schwall, Hedwig.schwall@arts.kuleuven.be
You will be notified by 20 December.

More information about the conference will be posted on www.irishstudies.kuleuven.be/