

Embodied Preaching (Padua/online, 24–25 Oct 24)

Online / Palazzo Liviano, Padua, Italy, Oct 24–25, 2024

Micol Long

Embodied Preaching: Multisensorial Preaching Performances in Medieval Europe.

3rd International Multidisciplinary Conference of the Series 'Experiencing the Sacred'.

Organised by Zuleika Murat, Pieter Boonstra, Micol Long.

The crucial importance of preaching in medieval Europe has long been acknowledged, not only for religious culture, but also for cultural, political and social history, art history and history of material culture. An interconnected pan-European phenomenon, to be effective preaching needed to be at the same time tailored to local tastes and conventions, shaping the message to the circumstances at hand. With the term “preaching” we understand the public performance of a speech believed to be divinely inspired and meant for religious and moral education. Most importantly, medieval preaching was not the static transfer of a text from preacher to audience: rather, it was an inherently dynamic and interactive activity, involving multiple actors through time and space, communicating religious knowledge within embodied and spatialized networks.

The conference will focus on the multisensorial dimension of preaching, which goes beyond the content and style of the textual sermon, to include the personal appearance of the preacher, their voice and gestures (the “embodied” dimension), the material environment in which the preaching took place (the “embedded” dimension) and the use of “special effects” (such as sounds or fire) and objects as an integral part of the performance.

The role played by the material environment in which the preaching took place has received little attention, and mostly with reference to memory (Carruthers 1998, Bolzoni 2002). It has been pointed out that some late medieval religious leaders (such as Bernardino of Siena) referred in their speeches to specific elements of the material environment in which they were preaching (for example, artworks), presumably to help keep awake the attention of the audience and to “anchor” the teaching to material elements which could be seen by individuals on a daily basis. However, much remains to be done to understand whether and to what extent the specific material environment affected the overall experience of preaching (open vs closed space, specific environments such as churches, saint’s tombs, graveyards, squares and so on). Preachers operated amidst a visual network of objects and spaces, against a background of paintings, sculptures, and other images present within the same space where they performed, giving opportunity for the sermon to connect, contrast, or compete for attention. This also raises the question to what extent preachers adapted their preaching to the particular environment and planned the setting in which the preaching had to take place.

A further element that deserves to be considered is that, as an act of communication, preaching

was not a one-way interaction: the audience, through their attitude, verbal and non-verbal reactions to the preaching played an active role which affected the experience both of the individuals gathered to listen and of the preacher. Based on this, we propose to approach preaching an interactive performance where multiple actors and multiple elements played a role. For this purpose, we will approach audiences using the notion of "socio-sensory environment", and assuming the existence of specific sensoria depending on social, cultural and geographical factors. Preaching relied on the various senses to be properly understood and make a lasting impact: the oral and aural performance of the sermon took place within a visually accessible space, with the preacher using both voice and body (gestures, facial expressions) to convey a message. From the sermon text, listeners are often invited to fully employ their senses as well and to imagine themselves present at religiously significant moments: to see the scene before their eyes, to hear what was occurring, to smell, taste, and feel, their internal or imaginary senses giving rise for meditation and devotion. Meanwhile, the experiences of pleasant or unpleasant smells or feelings of cold, heat, or discomfort can also be investigated from a sensory perspective.

With a primary focus on Western Europe from the 12th to the 15th century, this conference aims to explore preaching in an innovative and holistic way, by considering the multisensorial dimension of the transmission and reception of the word of God in whichever form, verbal or non-verbal. By emphasising the range of activities aimed at communicating religious knowledge and devotional practice, and the multisensorial nature of such activities, this conference will explore new aspects of the multifaceted experience of medieval preaching.

PROGRAMME.

24 October - Palazzo Liviano, Sala Sartori.

9.15 - 9.30 Welcome and introduction.

9.30 Session I - The Sermon Embodied, chaired by Micol Long, Università di Padova.

Elisabeth Niederdöckl, EHESS Paris / KU Leuven, Unveiling the Devotion on the 12th-century Wolbero Portable Altar.

Patricia Stoop, University of Antwerp, Tasting the Sweet Spices of God's Word: Sermon-Reading as a Multisensorial Experience in the Late Medieval Low Countries.

Pieter Boonstra, Università di Padova, Scripture in Many Forms: The Materialization of Preaching in a Sermon of Goswinus Hex (1467).

Discussion.

Coffee Break.

11.30 Session II - The Preaching Stage, chaired by Zuleika Murat, Università di Padova.

Arianna Favaretto Cortese, Università di Verona, Preaching in Venice between the 14th and the 15th centuries.

Caroline Bruzelius, Duke University, Mendicant Preaching and Urban Space Discussion.

Lunch Break.

14.30 Session III - Nature and The Senses, chaired by Giovanni Catapano, Università di Padova.

Sofia Riccardi, Università di Siena, Preaching, Senses and the Animal World: Sight and Smell in the "Proprietates rerum naturalium adaptatae sermonibus de tempore".

Eleonora Lombardo, Università di Padova, "Artifex numquam ita bene cognoscitur sicut per opera sua". Perceiving Nature and Knowing God in Bindo Scream da Sena's Sermons.

Mathilde Hamm, Sorbonne University, Physical Talk in Jacob's Well, an English Treatise on the Cleaning of Man's Conscience; Speaking to the Body to Inspire the Soul.

Discussion.

Coffee Break.

16.30 Session IV - The Body and The Senses, chaired by Pieter Boonstra, Università di Padova.

Richard Newhauser, Arizona State University, Guilielmus Peraldus on the Sensing Body.

Pietro Delcorno, Università di Bologna, Hairs on Fire: Sante Boncor's Trichological Obsession.

Discussion.

25 October - Palazzo Liviano, Aula Diano.

09.00 Session V - Women's Voices, chaired by Giulia Zornetta, Università di Padova.

Carolyn Muessig, University of Calgary, "Open my Lips and my Mouth will Announce your Praise": Embodying the Word of Female Preaching in the Late Middle Ages.

Sergi Sancho Fibla, Université Clermont-Auvergne, Places, Liturgy and Preaching. Influences and Conditioning in the Revelations of Constança de Rabastens.

Pablo Acosta-García, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Her Tongue and the Husky Voice of Christ: the Soundspace of Juana de la Cruz's (1481-1534) Visionary Preaching.

Daniela Graca, University of Cambridge, Blood and Milk are on thy Tongue: Envoicing Love and Spiritual Nourishment in Suor Domenica da Paradiso's Preaching and Singing.

Discussion.

Coffee break.

11.00 Session VI - Rituals and Performances, chaired by Eleonora Lombardo, Università di Padova.

Danny Smith Salfati, Columbia University, Performing Doctrine: The Pope, The Jews, and A Public Rejection.

Nancy Spatz Lucid, Independent Researcher, The Experience of Attending University Inception Ceremonies.

Nirit Ben-Aryeh Debby, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Word and Image: Christian, Jewish, and Muslim Preaching and Visual Culture in the Medieval and Early Modern World.

Discussion.

Round Table & Conclusions.

Pieter Boonstra, Eleonora Lombardo, Micol Long, Zuleika Murat.

Lunch.

The conference is organized by Zuleika Murat, Pieter Boonstra and Micol Long in the context of the ERC research project SenSArt – The Sensuous Appeal of the Holy. Sensory Agency of Sacred Art and Somatised Spiritual Experiences in Medieval Europe (12th-15th century), Grant Agreement nr. 950248, PI Zuleika Murat, Università degli Studi di Padova (<https://sensartproject.eu/>). This project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No 950248).

Link to sign up for online participation:
<https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSegJY643YppDCOVUuXeqHptVqGupQxGiQq2PVO2XGLqE83oOA/viewform>.

<https://sensartproject.eu/conference-on-embodied-preaching-multisensorial-preaching-performances-in-medieval-europe/>

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