

Workshop & Lecture Scales of Mysticism

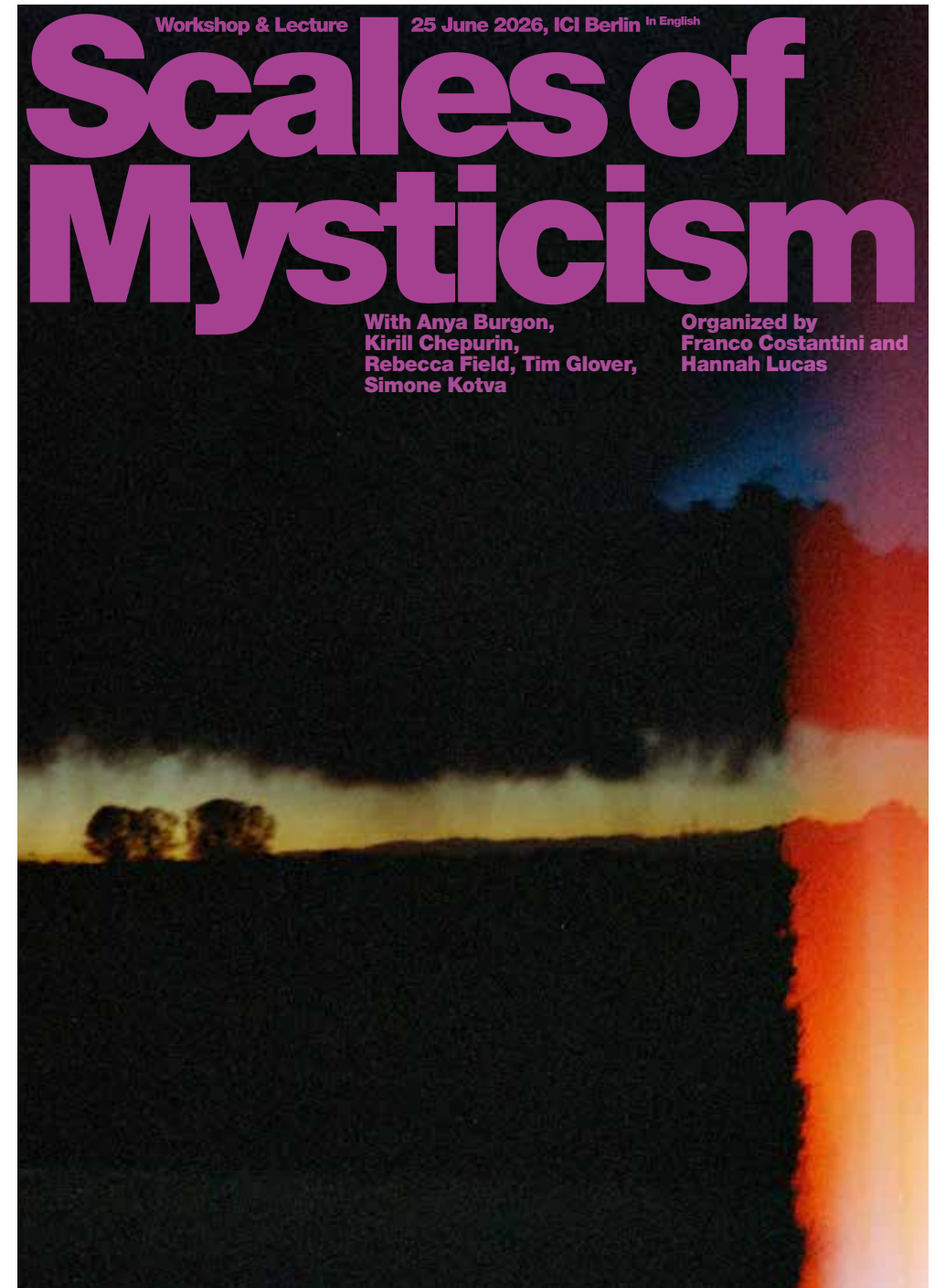
25 June 2026

15:00 – 17:30 Workshop
19:00 – 21:00 Lecture
In English

Organized by
Franco Costantini and
Hannah Lucas

With
Anya Burgon
Kirill Chepurin
Rebecca Field
Tim Glover
Simone Kotva

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	Programme
15:00	Introduction by Franco Costantini and Hannah Lucas
15:20	Short presentations by Anya Burgon, Kirill Chepurin, Rebecca Field, and Tim Glover
16:00	Coffee Break
16:30 – 17:30	Discussion
19:00	Lecture by Simone Kotva Abyssal Apex: On Scale and scala in Christian Mysticism

In the history of Western Christian mysticism, height meets depth and scales collide. In this lecture, Kotva will be thinking about the coincidence of apex and abyss in selected manuals of mystical theology. While some manuals favour the image of the mind's ascent, others emphasise its descent — but all speak of 'stages' (*scalae*) and step-by-step itineraries. A tension emerges between incremental progress (where scale appears measurable) and the collapsing of scale in mystic union (where scale appears suspended). What is the relationship between *scalae* and scale, between linear progress on the one hand and suspended scales on the other?

Simone Kotva is a Reader in Systematic Theology in the Department of Literature, History of Ideas and Religion at the University of Gothenburg. Simone is a scholar-practitioner of mysticism with a special interest in Catholic spiritual exercises. She is the author of *Effort and Grace: On the Spiritual Exercise of Philosophy* (Bloomsbury, 2020) as well as *Ecologies of Ecstasy: Mysticism, Philosophy and Vegetal Life* (Columbia, 2026).

Workshop (15:00 – 21:00)

Scales of Mysticism

Mysticism has always involved encounters with scale: the self-dissolving into something larger, the vast becoming intimate, experience that overflows the boundaries of the individual and the measurable. It is telling that Evelyn Underhill referred to mysticism as 'experience in its most intense form'. The mystical encounter is, by definition, excessive, beyond the bounds of ordinary human consciousness.

Because of this, mystical texts must negotiate the thickly paradoxical relations of the earthly and the divine, using poetic strategies of displacement, negation, and movement to describe that which the human mind cannot easily comprehend. Mystical writing is—following the Middle English meaning of the word *mystik*—essentially figurative, signalling the mysteries of God through appropriately 'misty' language. The mystical text pursues a non-closing chain of signification, shifting across scales as it gestures always further towards ineffability.

Yet if describing a mystical experience is demanding, pursuing one is just as challenging. For millennia, religious and spiritual traditions have developed practical spiritual exercises for seeking toward mystical experiences. These are historically and culturally contingent, often carefully mediated, sometimes radical accounts of the pursuit of a mystical encounter. Such exercises involve sustained and focused attention, prayer, and meditation on an object, word, feeling, or thought. They ask the contemplative to see the world with a different gaze, one which often challenges presumptions of dualism, materialism, and individualism. This gaze is, almost always, one which tries to see across scales.

Yet 'mysticism' is itself a contested and historically contingent term. We are now well past the essentialist assumption—associated with William James, Stace, and others—that there exists a universal, transhistorical mystical experience with a common phenomenological core. Mysticism as a category was largely constructed in the late nineteenth century, and subsequent scholarship has shown how that construction marginalised gender, embodiment, and the specificities of cultural and doctrinal context. This event does not seek to rehabilitate a unified or essentialist mysticism. Rather, it proposes scale as heuristic: a way of thinking across the diversity of mystical literature, practice, and experience without collapsing that diversity into a false universal. Whatever else mysticism is or is not, it consistently stages encounters with scale—and it is this that makes it, even now, a productive and generative category for humanistic inquiry.

This event gathers new currents in the scholarship on mystical literature, theory, and practice, pressing beyond confessional and periodising frameworks to ask what mysticism does—as a habit of perception, or a form of knowing that resists reduction to the religious, the historical, or the sectarian. Mysticism, defined here intentionally capaciously, names an experience of inner excess that suspends the logic of the bounded individual and opens onto things otherwise foreclosed: modes of attention, forms of community, and relations to the nonhuman world.