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Ruprecht-Karls-Universität Sonderforschungsbereich 619

Heidelberg Ritualdynamik

Speaker: Prof. Dr. Axel Michaels

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Heidelberg, 11 February 2008

International Conference: "Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual"

(Heidelberg, 29 September to 2 October 2008)

Ritual Spectacle or the Spectacle as Ritual – Musicology in the Shifting Perspectives of Ritual Dynamics and Ritual Studies: Collaborative Research Centre 619 breaks new ground.

The Collaborative Research Centre 619 "Ritual Dynamics" (SFB 619) at Heidelberg University is holding an international conference on "Ritual Dynamics and the Science of Ritual" from 29 September till 2 October 2008. Experts from around the world have been invited to Heidelberg to discuss their current findings and present them to a wider audience. Over 250 experts will give brief outlines of their research findings and put them up for discussion, including famous names in ritual studies and two leading authorities from the field of musicology, Silke Leopold (Heidelberg) and Reinhard Strohm (Oxford).

That rituals, contrary to the long-held belief, can change and even adapt to the possibilities and demands of the global era has been clearly demonstrated by the findings made by SFB 619 since it was founded in 2002. SFB 619 is the largest research centre worldwide dedicated solely to the subject of rituals, how they change, and their dynamics. The centre performs pure research with the aim of developing theories with cross-cultural validity, and finding explanatory models for the socio-cultural significance of ritual action, as for instance in the legitimisation of power or creation of identity, in crisis therapy, or the maintenance of order. Currently, nineteen projects are being conducted by over 90 researchers from the fields of Anthropology of South Asia, Ancient, Mediaeval and Modern History, Assyriology, Classical and Modern Indology, Comparative Religion, Egyptology, the History of East Asian Art, the History of South Asia, Islamic Studies, Medical Psychology, Musicology, and Theology. With this conference, SFB 619 also aims to expand and consolidate its interdisciplinary approach. The interdisciplinary teamwork will be focused on twenty-one panels, lasting in some cases several days.

Just how fascinating the marriage between musicology and ritual studies can be is shown by the panel hosted by Silke Leopold: "Ritual, Performance, and Event". A renowned expert on both early music and Mozart, Silke Leopold will be investigating the relationship between ritual and spectacle in every aspect of culture and society. New here will be the insight that performative artworks may by all means be regarded as rituals. The brief presentations, featuring case and comparative studies from the realms of music, dance, theatre, literature, film and the performing arts, will focus on the staging of rituals and cast light on ritual elements in performances

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and spectacles. They will explore the question of how far spectacles may be viewed as rituals and what social impact such events have. General issues concerning ritual, aesthetics and reception will be considered as equally as questions about the semiotics of performance. Reinhard Strohm, an authority on music of the late Middle Ages and 18th century Italian opera, as well as co-editor of the Complete Works of Richard-Wagner, will be making a major contribution.

An air of great anticipation surrounds the project to be unveiled by Axel Michaels, spokesman of SFB 619 and Professor of Classical Indology at the South Asia Institute in Heidelberg. In the panel "Grammar and Morphology of Ritual" he will present his preliminary thoughts on a universal "grammar of rituals" that also takes into account the non-verbal aspects of communication.

Over and beyond fundamental methodological and theoretical issues, the conference will also act as an opportunity to convey the latest approaches in the research, such as ritual economics, ritual design, and scientific rituals, and to discuss new topic areas such as intercultural ritual transfer and the link between rituals and the new media. New to many of the disciplines involved will be the insight that quite familiar procedures or actions can be viewed as rituals. Important new impulses will be sought here from those who straddle the sciences and ritual practice.

In order to underscore the social relevance of ritual research and heed its educational remit from the university, SFB 619 also wishes to communicate the topics of its research over and beyond the academic framework, particularly through its accompanying programme. This is planned to include a concert by Evelyn Tubb and Anthony Rooley entitled "The Anatomy of Solitude", which will feature early lute music.

The official period for registration begins on 15 February 2008. All those interested can find the relevant information at www.rituals-2008.com and sign up for the conference newsletter.

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