

CALL FOR PAPERS

4th Annual Arts and Medias Symposium of the University of Montreal

November 24-25, 2016



Inside the Ritual: Approaches, Practices and Representations in the Arts

Aby Warburg was hospitalized at a clinic Kreuzlingen, Switzerland in 1921 due to psychotic disorders. Two years later, he was invited to give a lecture in order to prove his sanity. That lecture, known as the Serpent Ritual, which Warburg did not attend, has served to feed the mythology that surrounds the atypical researcher. Apart from the legend and confusion related to the event, however, the study of ritual as practice and representation in Warburg's work participates in a movement of true interpretive renewal, a welding of art and life. With this legend in mind, the fourth edition of the Arts and Medias Symposium of the University of Montreal intends to contribute to the study of ritual by inviting participants to think about the many implications that ritual can reveal in art history and film studies.

In its simplest formulation, ritual consists of repeated and codified gestures that are collectively or individually experienced. Ritual is far more complex than this, however, as is demonstrated by the diversity of approaches in anthropology. Moreover, it is better to understand and conceive of ritual as a fluctuating, open concept in order to explore its full potential. Ritual convenes historical and contemporary perspectives, both sacred and profane. It further invites reflection on how practices intersect, particularly with regard to the transformation and dissemination across time and culture.

Art history has examined countless examples of ritual. Consider, for example, representations of funeral, sacrificial, Eucharistic rituals or rites of worship, as well as repeated gesture or the body in action. Nowadays, the question of the representation of ritual has an added ethical dimension related to the gaze of the "other". What is implied by, what is brought to light through representations of ritual in art history? How have some filmmakers – notably Jean Rouch and Pierre Perrault – depicted ritual? What media, artistic and poetic means are used to represent ritual? What discourses underlie the figures of ritual? Who represents ritual, and to what end?

Art furthermore participates in ritual, and ritual involves art, through the endorsement of an expressive function, either symbolic or performative. Thinkers like David Freedberg or Hans Belting have shown that the worship and efficacy of the image are interrelated; the Imago Pietatis and the votive image are good examples of this. Ritual stages the body in acts of dancing, singing, imitating, praying, or absorbed by the accomplishment of daily tasks. Contemporary art has also made effective use of ritual, particularly in the realm of performance, where some artists are reclaiming original myths. In this sense, studio practices themselves can be considered as performative ritual; the body of the artist channels identity, political and autotelic issues. Alternatively, ritual may put into perspective the notion of performativity, which J.L. Austin's work (1970) inscribes in a strict codification. What ritualistic practices intervene in

the history of art and cinema? What artistic practices serve to reclaim ritual? What actors, what roles are involved in ritual and who are the performers: religious leaders and artists; or amateurs and spectators? Can we identify specific places, certain periods in which the ritual is practiced? Does the resurgence of the ritual have certain ideological implications?

The critical horizon of Walter Benjamin's text, *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproducibility* (1935), defines the value of cult in opposition to the value of exhibition. According to this criticism, technique would mean a loss of the ritual in the regime of art. Ritual, however, ranges from the practices of the museum visitor, as studied by Carol Duncan (1995), to ritual of going to the movie theatre, studied by Andréanne Pâquet (2003). Moreover, ritual is renewed throughout the digital era – it does not die, but adapts. We can speak only of a plurality of rituals, be they negative or positive. Ritual may, for example, seek to stage a transformation, to regulate daily life, or to ensure social cohesion and even trivialize the act of thinking. Consequently, the functions of ritual call for various theoretical frameworks.

Considering the many possible avenues of consideration on this theme, the conference seeks to engage discussions around the following two axes:

Representations of rituals: artistic or filmic representations (e.g. ethnographic films, documentary or fictionalized representations of ritual); artistic reappropriation; mediums of representation; methodological aspects solicited by ritual; the anthropology of images.

Ritual practices: objects involved in rituals/ceremonies; places of ritual; artistic creation as ritual; the ritual of the spectator; the poetic dimension; ritual in the face of new media; performance; dance; the intentionality of ritual through amateur practices, for example.

We invite graduate students as well as teachers, researchers and museum professionals of all disciplinary backgrounds to submit a proposal by May 27, 2016. To send your proposal, complete the form provided for this purpose and return it to colloqueharudem@gmail.com. For questions about the conference, you can reach us through the same address.

