

# ***Rituals from Life to Death: Performance, Arts and Society***

Wednesday 25 June 2014, 11:10 – 18:00 (with registration from 10:30)  
Wolfson Research Exchange Seminar Rooms, The University of  
Warwick

*Funding generously provided by the Research Student Skills Programme (RSSP) and the departments of History of Art and Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick.*



This is a one-day postgraduate conference co-organised between the departments of History of Art and Cultural Policy Studies to explore the theme of ritual. The role of ritual in society has been largely acknowledged as fundamental for the construction and consolidation of identity. In everyday contemporary life, one finds ritualised cultural practices, such as sports and food consumption. This conference will explore their different manifestations and history through a comparative approach. Together we will investigate the emotional effect of ritual on its participants in the past as well as in our own time, and consider its impact on wider audiences. The role of artistic production in connection to ritual will be at the heart of our discussion, examining works of art from their conception to their dissemination and use. This will encompass the relationship between the enactment of ritual and the ritual object.

web <http://www2.warwick.ac.uk/fac/arts/arthistory/news/rituals/>

## PROGRAMME

- 10.30 – 11.10 Registration and Refreshments
- 11.10 – 11.20 Opening Remarks and Housekeeping
- First Panel**
- 11.20 – 11.40 Steven Franklin, Royal Holloway, University of London, *The Changing Face of Magna Carta Day*
- 11.40 – 12.00 Stefano Colombo, University of Warwick, *Religious Piety and Celebratory Rhetoric in the Seventeenth-Century Venetian Sepulchral Monuments*
- 12.00 – 12.20 Thanavi Chotpradit, Birkbeck, University of London, *Constituting the Constitution: Photographs of King Prajadhipok in the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony*
- 12.20 – 12.30 Questions for the first panel
- Keynote Address 1**
- 12.30 – 13.20 Dr Jenny Alexander, History of Art Department, University of Warwick, *Public or Private Ritual Space? Lincoln Cathedral's Angel Choir in the later-medieval period*
- 13.20 – 14.20 Lunch Break (provided for all delegates)
- Second Panel**
- 14.20 – 14.40 Tess Radcliffe, University of Wolverhampton, *Still Life and Eroticism*
- 14.40 – 15.00 Zahra Tharani, Kings College London, University of London, *Ritual, Community and Cognition in the Cult of Isis*
- 15.00 – 15.20 Christian Attard, University of Malta, *The Waiting Soul: The Imagery and Ritual of Purgatory in Malta*
- 15.20 – 15.30 Questions for the second panel
- 15.30 – 15.50 Tea/Coffee Break
- Third Panel**
- 15.50 – 16.10 Naomi Vogt, University of Oxford, *Reenacting Ritual: Mike Kelley's Installations as Anthropological Space?*
- 16.10 – 16.30 Wei Yu, Birkbeck, University of London, *Ritual, Physical Body and Sound Machine: On Lin Chiwei's Tape Music Series*
- 16.30 – 16.50 Robert Rapoport, Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford, *Code and Causation: A Ritual Framing of Algorithmic Video Editing*
- 16.50 – 17.00 Questions for the third panel
- Keynote Address 2**
- 17.00 – 17.50 Dr Yvette Hutchison, School of Theatre, Performance and Cultural Policy Studies, University of Warwick, *Ritual in Contemporary Theatre and Performance: The Sacred and/as the Profane*
- 17.50 – 18.00 Closing Remarks
- 18.00 – 18.40 Wine Reception

# ***Rituals from Life to Death: Performance, Arts and Society***

## **ABSTRACTS**

### **Dr Jenny Alexander**

*Public or Private Ritual Space? Lincoln Cathedral's Angel Choir in the later-medieval period*

Lincoln Cathedral's Angel Choir was built in the second half of the 13th century to provide a suitable setting for the shrine of St Hugh, the canonised bishop of Lincoln. The shrine was sited in the middle bay of the choir, behind the high altar and, within 60 years, the east end had become a mausoleum for royalty and the nobility of the region, who built elaborate tombs and endowed chantries within chapels that were close to the saint. The presence of the saint continued to attract burials, both internments under the floor and those in chapels that broke through the outside walls, until the end of the medieval period, when the shrine was dismantled. By the late-medieval period there were two *loci sancti* associated with St Hugh within the Angel Choir and examination of the relationships between these and the tomb monuments that cluster around them reveals significant insights into the use of the ritual space in the building.

*Dr Jenny Alexander studied Art History at the University of East Anglia and archaeology at Nottingham University. She has taught in undergraduate and adult education departments of various universities and worked as a consultant archaeologist on medieval and early-modern sites and buildings before moving to Warwick to take up a Teaching Fellowship. She is also consultant to the masons' marks recording project for the Works Department of Trondheim Cathedral (Norway), and has been appointed to chair the Corpus of Romanesque Sculpture of Britain and Ireland, a British Academy funded project. [www.crsbi.ac.uk](http://www.crsbi.ac.uk)*

### **Dr Yvette Hutchison**

*Ritual in Contemporary Theatre and Performance: the Sacred and/as the Profane*

This paper will begin by contextualising the various ways in which ritual is defined and used performatively in contemporary society: in profane, social practices in everyday life, sporting and public events; and in sacred practices, including religious observances and rites of passage. It then places ritual in relation to various historical and cultural theatre practices, before considering the impact of translating various codified aesthetics that have defined ritual theatre in many parts of the world into twentieth century experimental theatre that has attempted to shift the focus of European theatre from text to embodied experience. This shift is particularly interesting when such embodied performance incorporates elements of ritual and is juxtaposed to testimony in the context of investigating a communally held traumatic event in and through theatre. The affects of this juxtaposition of forms upon an audience are evident in South African theatre post-1994, in particular in the work of Yael Farber and Brett Bailey. I will explore the nature of tragedy and

justice/reconciliation by analysing to what extent Bailey's *Ipi Zombie?* (1998, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5YQLpFRx0Fk>, trailer, 3.16 mins) and Farber's *Molora* (Ashes, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OaLnLckySio>, trailer, 1.25 mins) suggest how ritual theatre engages the sacred and profane as 'redressive social action' (Turner, 1982).

*Dr Yvette Hutchison is associate professor in the Department of Theatre & Performance Studies at the University of Warwick, UK. Her research focuses on Anglophone African theatre, history and narratives of memory, and how intercultural performance practices are challenged by ongoing postcolonial issues. She is associate editor of the South African Theatre Journal and the African Theatre series, and has co-edited books with Kole Omotoso and Eckhard Breiting. She completed the Leverhulme project Performing Memory: Theatricalising identity in contemporary South Africa in 2012, which resulted in the monograph South African Performance and Archives of Memory (Manchester University Press, 2013). Her current research is considering the aesthetics contemporary South African women artists are employing to address issues of gender and conflict, and various artistic renegotiations of European colonisation of Africa through an ethnographic gaze.*

### **Christian Attard (University of Malta)**

*The Waiting Soul: The Imagery and Ritual of Purgatory in Malta*

In late 1676, Sebastianus Baldacchino willed a hundred masses to be celebrated for all the souls in Purgatory. He also bizarrely laid down that he wanted two virgin girls to fast on bread and water for a whole year in suffrage of his soul. In Malta, the first indication of a belief in an otherworldly place of purgation goes back to the late fifteenth century. Purgatory's presence could thenceforth be found everywhere; from last wills, which often lay out complex suffrages to be carried out by the inheritors, to eerie images of imploring souls plunged in cleansing fires. Its presence could also be felt in sermons and handbooks whose main aim was to urge the community to do its utmost to help the souls of its dead members. Confraternities were often set up with the intention of taking care of these souls.

*Christian Attard is an art historian and educator who lectures at the Malta School of Art and at the University of Malta. He co-authored a commemorative book on the artist Ġużeppi Briffa (1901-1987) in 2001 and published a monograph about the artist Gianni Vella (1885-1977) in 2013. His main areas of research include the art of the turn-of-the-twentieth century and the iconography of death. He is currently working on a doctoral thesis titled The Visual Culture of Death in Malta in an Age of Plague supervised by Prof. Keith Sciberras and Prof. Nigel Llewellyn.*

### **Thanavi Chotpradit (Birkbeck, University of London)**

*Constituting the Constitution: Photographs of King Prajadhipok in the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony*

On 24th June 1932, the People's Party staged the revolution to change the Thai political system from absolute monarchy to constitutional monarchy. The Royal

Constitution Granting Ceremony which took place on the 10th December 1932 demonstrates the constitutional act of King Prajadhpok (King Rama VII, r. 1925-1935) in establishing the new regime. This paper discusses the royal granting ceremony as a performative ritual in which the monarchical power and its place—the Anantha Samakhom Throne Hall—were employed to authorise, enunciate and announce a new political regime. It concentrates on a series of photographic images of Prajadhipok in the Royal Constitution Granting Ceremony and explains how these images functioned in the broader aspects of visual culture in the People's Party era.

*Thanavi Chotpradit is a PhD candidate with the Department of History of Art and Screen Media at Birkbeck, University of London. Her thesis interrogates the role of visual culture in the royalist and anti-royalist debates in Thailand from 1932 to the present. Her areas of interest include Modern and Thai contemporary art, memory studies and Thai politics.*

**Stefano Colombo (University of Warwick)**

*Religious Piety and Celebratory Rhetoric in the Seventeenth-Century Venetian Sepulchral Monuments*

Civic connotation of religious rituals and ritual objects has a prominent place in the history of Venice. This phenomenon is particularly evidenced in the seventeenth century when sepulchral monuments in honour of Venetian rulers acquired a distinctive rhetorical dimension apt to extol the rulers' body politic: apart from commemorating the devotion of the deceased, these monuments were conceived of as living images capable to engage with the viewers and to instil persuasive ideas. This paper examines the ideological impact of these monuments on the civic and political life in seventeenth-century Venice from the dogate of Giovanni Pesaro (1589-1659) to that of Silvestro Valier (1630-1700). By recognising the rhetorical values invoked by the monuments, which are verbalised in panegyric literature and ritualised in the ceremonial, I will demonstrate the crucial role of religion in shaping the civic identity of the Venetian Republic in the early modern era.

*Stefano Colombo is an AHRC-funded doctoral student in History of Art at the University of Warwick researching the politics of sepulchral monuments in seventeenth-century Venice. He completed his MA in History of Art at Università Ca' Foscari, Venice, with a thesis focused on the commemorative paintings of doges in the Ducal Palace in Venice.*

**Steven Franklin (Royal Holloway, University of London)**

*The Changing Face of Magna Carta Day*

The year 2015 will mark the 800th anniversary of the sealing of Magna Carta on the fields of Runnymede. Throughout its history Magna Carta has been continually celebrated and commemorated. Nowhere is this more evident than within the communities of Egham and Englefield Green – the two closest to the fields of Runnymede. Since the early 1900s however, the form in which these commemorative moments have taken has significantly changed. Broadly speaking

commemorative activity has moved from a religiously orientated service to today's annual 'Magna Carta Day' that takes place along Egham's High Street. This paper will seek to analyse the way in which the annual Magna Carta celebrations have changed over the past 100 years and provide a platform to consider how this could be due to changing cultural priorities.

*Steven Franklin is a part-time PhD student in his third year at Royal Holloway. He has been at this institution since 2007 and previously received a BA in History and MA in Public History. His thesis is centrally concerned with the commemoration and celebration of Magna Carta since its sealing in 1215. He is approaching this from the Public History perspective, so rather than concentrating on the events of 1215, his focus lies instead on how future societies have used it and ascribed meaning to the document.*

**Tess Radcliffe (University of Wolverhampton)**  
***Still Life and Eroticism***

Seventeenth century Dutch, Flemish and Spanish Still Life paintings have traditionally been interpreted as moralising *vanitas* images. Norman Bryson argued for a critical theorisation of still life painting (1990), prompting further historical and theoretical responses; Berger (2011), Hochstrasser (2007), and Grootenboer (2006) either challenge or maintain the overarching *vanitas* theme. I propose a new theoretical reading of Still Life applying Georges Bataille's theory of eroticism. Bataille argues that eroticism can be understood as the transgressing of societal taboos on sex and death, both of which are violent and linked to the ritual of sacrifice. Ritual sacrifice is sacred, separate from the profane world of production, and performs the expulsion of excess energies. Therefore, I argue for the consideration of seventeenth-century still life painting as erotic images which covertly imply the ritual violence and disorder of sex and death through the depiction of objects which allude to the dismembered and fragmented body.

*Tess Radcliffe is in her first year of part-time PhD study at the University of Wolverhampton. Her principal research concerns are 'Still Life and Eroticism' where she interrogates the interpretation of seventeenth- to eighteenth-century, Dutch, Flemish and Spanish Still Life paintings as vanitas images, and proposes a new theoretical reading applying Georges Bataille's theory of eroticism. She is the Learning and Community Engagement Manager for Wolverhampton Art Gallery, Wolverhampton City Archives, Bantock House Museum and Bilston Craft Gallery, and has worked in many galleries, museums and archives across the West Midlands.*

**Robert Rapoport (Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford)**  
***Code and Causation: A Ritual Framing of Algorithmic Video Editing***

'Is it possible to make a film about a ritual without ever showing a ritual at all?' - David MacDougall (1989)

The representation of ritual has long posed an epistemological question for ethnographic filmmakers. Rituals, specifically those in which the human body

mediates the divine, pose particular problems. How might this existing debate from anthropology inform a new critical approach to films authored in part by artificial intelligence? These questions around authorship and performance create framework applicable to newer social forms mediated by computer code. Using the emergent practice of algorithmic film editing, I look at how this new grammar of film might accommodate an expanded notion of ritual in the 21st-century. Some rituals are framed, at least in part, by an external intelligence that both participates in and observes the performance. Is there an analogy here with the experience of algorithmically edited films (also called database cinema)? I suggest that these films shift our understanding of the ritual of cinema and heighten its inherent liminality. These films, by giving form to what otherwise remains invisible (code) take on a ritual quality. Moreover, as this mode of production proliferates both commercially and artistically it is essential to develop a critical discourse around the kind of spectator it creates.

*Robert Rapoport is a filmmaker and research student at the Ruskin School of Art, University of Oxford. His research focuses on what happens to notions of authorship in new media that increasingly employ artificial intelligence. His DPhil has been funded by The Ruskin School of Art. He has collaborated with a wide range of anthropologists and artists exploring innovative approaches to the moving image.*  
[www.robertrapoport.com](http://www.robertrapoport.com)

### **Zahra Tharani (Kings College London, University of London)**

*Ritual, Community and Cognition in the Cult of Isis*

Research into religion revealed the extent to which religious experience shapes understanding. Individual and communal participation create and develop new and existing cognitive processes. This paper argues that the Cult of Isis was both an individual and communal ritual that determined understanding and identity. It considers sensory experience in terms of pageantry and low intensity rituals, the use of water for bathing, clothing, instruments and effects of atmosphere. Furthermore cognition depends on community participation and beliefs; identity and belonging; the hierarchical relationship between agent and participant; and the status of the individual within that community once initiated. This debate draws on literature of Apuleius and visual imagery as evidence of ritual and cultural thought. Yet any conclusions must consider issues of the interpretation, bias, selection and translation. This paper shows that religious cognition is culturally and socially bound where the individual is a participant in an established ritualistic and belief system.

*Zahra Tharani is an MA student in Ancient History at Kings College London, looking at Greek Religion in terms of culture and cognition. She is interested in the relationship between ritual, experience and cognition, and the cultural and social forces that shape religious identity, belonging and understanding. Her other research interests include the reception of classical mythology in Catholic art during the Renaissance.*

**Naomi Vogt (University of Oxford)**

*Reenacting Ritual: Mike Kelley's Installations as Anthropological Space?*

Within contemporary art practices that delve into ritual, the boundary between the study and the redesign of rites has become increasingly blurred. How does one concurrently negotiate critical distance and participation as analytical methods of contemporary rituals? This paper examines the context for such cases, focusing on the work of Mike Kelley. Beginning in 2000, Kelley conceived *Extracurricular Activity Projective Reconstruction*, a vast series of 365 videos embedded in installations and that investigated and reenacted certain tropes of American vernacular culture. High school yearbooks were Kelley's initial source of artistic research, with a focus on youth appropriations of quotidian rituals, yet the work was ultimately designed to culminate in a grand finale screening-ritual with a live donkey basketball game as its centrepiece. Under these shifting circumstances, how are we to understand contemporary art's self-positioning as an anthropological and yet quasi-parodic study of daily rituals?

*Naomi Vogt is a doctoral student in Contemporary Art History at the University of Oxford, working under Dr Anthony Gardner. Her research explores contemporary art practices in relation to emerging Euro-American rituals and customs, with a view to examining non-traditional anthropological methods and their potential contributions. She holds a Master of Studies in History of Art and Visual Culture from the University of Oxford, a Bachelors in Archaeology and Art History from the Sorbonne, and a Foundation Diploma in Art and Design from ECAL, Lausanne. Her research is supported by Max Husmann-Stiftung and La Fondation Grandur pour l'Art.*

**Wei Yu (Birkbeck, University of London)**

*Ritual, Physical Body and Sound Machine: On Lin Chiwei's Tape Music Series*

This paper focuses on *Tape Music*, a sound art performance series by the Taiwanese artist, Lin Chiwei, which has been performed over forty times in various occasions since 2004. In each performance, the artist invites a group of participants to circulate around a 120-metre ribbon embroidered with a series of Chinese characters and to create sounds. This activity thus becomes a spontaneous and collective ritual of voice or, metaphorically, a sound machine constituted by physical bodies, a 'personified tape recorder'. By contextualising the artist's approach to the underground noise movement of Taiwan in the early 1990s, this paper aims to examine how the sado-masochistic relationship between the performance's ritualistic setting and its participants functions as a fundamental mechanism in the *Tape Music* series, as well as Lin's other works.

*Wei Yu is a PhD candidate in Humanities and Cultural Studies (London Consortium) at Birkbeck, University of London, with a research focus on Taiwan's alternative culture and avant-garde art in the 1990s. After obtaining his MA in Art History and Criticism, he was the editor of Artco magazine in Taiwan, 2005-07, and has been an independent art critic since 2008. His interests cover the intersection amongst transgression, excess, ruins and noise in contemporary art.*