Call for Papers

For a History of Festivals (19th – 21st centuries)

International Symposium
24-25-26 November 2011

Centre d’histoire sociale du XXe siècle (Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne)
Centre d’histoire culturelle des sociétés contemporaines (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin-en-Yvelines)

Although a “cultural object” especially popular in the early 21st century, festivals have not yet been examined through collaborative studies or broad historical syntheses. Consequently, we seek to bring together researchers from different disciplines, working on a variety of geographic areas and familiar with diverse archives and resources, in a context of contemporary history that may, where necessary, step back in time.

Several questions will be central. How do we tell the history of such artistic events that are both collective and ephemeral? Should we write a singular, or plural, history of festivals? How should we consider the connections between festivals as well as the relationships between festivals and the societies in which they occur? The objective is to examine how the path carved by these artistic forms can not only feed the contemporary debate about “public space”, but also give rise to the concept of “public moments”: festivals as space and time that are communally constructed, shaped, and contested.

The symposium will thus focus on moments of emergence, adoption, and diffusion of the festival “form”, which itself must be examined and defined from different perspectives (including genre, aesthetics, etc.). In the 19th century, the term “festival” applied only to the field of music, especially choral performances. Present in France by means of the “festivals orphéoniques”, the phenomenon was also prevalent in Switzerland, Belgium, Holland, Germany and England. Therefore, it will be useful to study this “prehistory” of festivals to identify if, and how, this 19th century heritage influenced the festivals of the 20th and 21st centuries. The symposium will take into account all forms of transmission and all relevant fields of creation without exception, whether or not connected to “mass culture” and including those fields considered the least legitimate. Examples may range from theatre, music, cinema, and photography, to comic books, comedy, and songs. We will also examine the different actors, institutional and otherwise, who contribute in one way or another to the creation and development of festivals, including promoters, organizers, artists, critics, and audiences. At the heart of this inquiry will be the forms of festivals that are adopted and the role that those festivals play in their respective societies. We hope to test the use of various typologies using different criteria (e.g. specialization, form of dissemination, artists’ staging, etc.).
This symposium, which is a continuation of the two-day workshop organized by the Centre Georges Chevrier (Université de Bourgogne) on February 2011, aims to be comparative and international in its approach: contributions on festivals from all continents are welcome. In this context, the roles of mediation and transmission played by festivals between artists, genres, or societies will be particularly valued, and case studies such as those addressing transnational cultural transfers will be preferred. Finally, the symposium will consider the question of what place festivals hold, and will hold, in the creation of a global culture.

To this end, we have identified several categories of interest:

A/ Definition and Scope
1/ What a festival is and is not
2/ The invention of the festival. Important precursors and early forebears.
3/ Moments of festival creativity. Locations and modes of dissemination and abandonment. Memory and nostalgia.

B/ Formal Perspective
1/ Actors: organization (public or private actors), production (professionals or amateurs), reception (critiques and “the public”)
2/ The festival as event: highlights, use of the media, and scandals. Festivals’ sociability and codes of behavior.
3/ Aesthetic forms: inventions, appropriations, and hybrids.

C/ Functional Perspective
1/ Political, economic and social issues. At local, regional, and national levels
2/ Creative issues. The role of festivals in the history of an artist or a genre (launching, manufacturing, consecration...)

Papers will be presented in French and in English.
Proposals of one page in length (up to 2,500 signs), along with a short resume, are to be sent before 10 December 2010 to: histoire.festivals@gmail.com

Scientific Committee: Antoine de Baecque (Université Paris Ouest), Edward Berenson (New York University), Peter Burke (University of Cambridge), Myriam Chimènes (CNRS), Anaïs Fléchet (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin), Eloi Ficquet (Centre Français des Études Éthiopiennes), Pascale Goetschel (Université Paris 1), Vinzenz Hediger (Ruh-Universität Bochum), Patricia Hidiroglou (Université Paris 1), Denis Laborde (Ehess), Sylvie Lindeperg (Université Paris 1), Emmanuelle Loyer (IEP de Paris), Caroline Moine (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin), Marcos Napolitano (Universidade de São Paulo), Emmanuel Négrier (Université de Montpellier), Pascal Ory (Université Paris 1), Philippe Poirier (Université de Bourgogne), Martine Segalen (Université Paris Ouest), Françoise Tétard (CNRS), Ludovic Tournès (Université Paris Ouest), Julie Verlaine (Université Paris 1), Emmanuel Wallon (Université Paris Ouest), Jean-Claude Yon (Université de Versailles Saint-Quentin).

Organization Committee: Anaïs Fléchet, Pascale Goetschel, Patricia Hidiroglou, Caroline Moine, Pascal Ory, Françoise Tétard, Julie Verlaine, Jean-Claude Yon.