

CONFERENCE

**ASSESSING, ADAPTING AND TRANSMITTING RITUALS
IN RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR CONTEXTS:
CROSS-DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES**

Musée du quai Branly, Paris

10-11 June 2014

organised by: Emma Gobin (LabEx CAP)
and Maxime Vanhoenacker (CNRS, IIAC-Tram)

CALL FOR PAPERS

Recent anthropological scholarship on ritual has emphasized the significance of forms of reflexivity inherent to ritual action. Termed “inner reflexivity” (Højbjerg, 2007) or “derived reflexivity” (Rozenberg, 2011), this reflexivity *of the* ritual appears as a result of the internal (and often specular) dynamics through which ritual (re)shapes individual and collective identities. It has thus been understood as a driving force of the “mechanics” of ritual and of its formal efficacy on those who undergo it (e.g. Severi, 2002; Bonhomme, 2005; Højbjerg, 2007; Houseman 2012). So far other concomitant forms of ritual reflexivity, which may be referred to as “critical”, have been less explored. Defined as “mirror reflexivity” (Højbjerg, 2007) or “instrumental reflexivity” (Rozenberg, 2011), they relate to the processes of negotiation through which ritual experts and/or officiants question, adjust and, ultimately, think and rethink their ceremonial practices for practical purposes, before and after performing them, but also *in situ*.

Based on the idea that this reflexive and critical activity is a necessary condition for the constant adaptation and (re)production of ritual (e.g. Grimes, 1990; Kreinath *et. al.* 2004; Hüsken, 2007, 2012), this conference intends to further explore this dynamic from both empirical and theoretical standpoints. Which are the contexts, the actual forms and the modes of enactment of such ritual assessment and criticism? How do they inform us about the ability of ritual experts to adapt their practices to shifting constraints and/or unprecedented events or, at another level, on the dialectic existing between ritual “mechanics” and the reflexivity of agents? Is it possible to identify formalised configurations underpinning these critical attitudes? If these forms of reflexivity *on* or *towards* the ritual obviously denote the intrinsic flexibility of the latter, don't they also play a part in its pragmatic efficacy? In other words, wouldn't it be worth to question them in their relation to the forms of reflexivity *of the* ritual mentioned above? Is there a constitutive link between ritual action and the reflection on this action and on the conditions of its possible reproduction and its successful outcome (formal and pragmatic)?

In order to address these anthropological issues which may also interest historians, sociologists, educational or political scientists working on ritualization processes, the conference aims at bringing together detailed case studies. These may stem from the disciplines mentioned and be borrowed from religious contexts (initiatory and divinatory systems, new spiritualities, institutionalised religions, etc.) as well as secular and politico-institutional –even educational– contexts (Republican baptism, hazing, scout ceremonies, etc.). Any paper based on detailed empirical data likely to enlighten the interactions pointed out will be examined. Those which fall within the following areas for reflection will be particularly welcome:

1. Ritual “accidents” or “hitches” as catalysers of reflexive dynamics underlying ceremonial performances: Ritual performances are full of “accidents” and “hitches” which are often left out of the analytical scope although they are consubstantial with ritual action. They act as significant “triggers” of dynamics of negotiation and adjustments likely to reveal the principles presiding in specific ritual organisations and the place they grant to adaptation rationale. How do these accidents and negotiations inherent to ritual (re)launch the vernacular reflection on ritual performance? What logics do sustain this reflection?

2. Institutionalised sequences aiming the assessment of ceremonial performances: Ethnographic literature offers several examples of institutionalised ritual sequences which involve the exercise of *ad hoc* assessments of actual ceremonial performances but which remain largely understudied. During these sequences, which may be intrinsic part of a ritual performance or take place immediately afterwards, ritual experts explicitly question the effectiveness of their practices and the way in which the latter should be implemented. What specific forms do these sequences take on and to what types of negotiation do they give rise? Is there a specific and direct link between the forms of reflexivity *of the* ritual and those which interest us?

3. The tools of ritual: In varying contexts, as a response to shifting situations, sometimes marked by competition between traditions, ritual experts adopt new tools such as writing, audio-visual recordings, etc. They deliberately incorporate them into ritual performances in order to reinforce their pragmatic efficacy or may use them to transmit and establish normative ritual models. Is it possible to detect in the use of these tools emblematic modalities of the dynamics of adaptation of ritual and of the reflexive processes they set in motion? How should we understand the role of agents in this respect?

By tackling these themes, the conference will attempt to account for the contexts and modalities through which forms of critical reflection, or of reflexivity *on* the ritual, are displayed. In particular, we will focus on both the practical execution of ceremonial sequences and performances and, when relevant, on what happens *between* two performances. In doing so, we will thus both question the status of these reflexive forms and examine ritual in light of vernacular processes of evaluation, adaptation and (re)creation associated to its successful execution and transmission.

Submission:

- Proposals for papers (500 words) should be sent to both Emma Gobin and Maxime Vanhoenacker by **27 January 2014**: emma.gobin@mae.u-paris10.fr, maxime.vanhoenacker@ehess.fr
- The decisions of the scientific committee on the proposals will be notified at the **end of February 2014**.
- Proposals and papers will be accepted in either French or English (No translation will be available during the presentations. A minimal comprehension of French and English will thus be useful to participate to collective discussions during the conference.)

Scientific committee:

Nicolas Adell, Maître de conférences à l'Université de Toulouse-Le Mirail, Laboratoire Interdisciplinaire, Solidarités, Sociétés, Territoires – LISST

Julien Clément, Adjoint au Directeur du Département de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement du musée du quai Branly

Jessica DeLargy Healy, chargée de la recherche au Département de la Recherche et de l'Enseignement/ du musée du Quai Branly, Centre de Recherche et de Documentation sur l'Océanie – CREDO

Michael Houseman, Directeur d'études à École Pratique des Hautes Etudes/ Institut des Mondes Africains - IMAf

Martine Segalen, Professeur émérite à l'Université Paris Ouest Nanterre La Défense, Maison de l'Archéologie et de l'Ethnologie (MAE)

Gilles Tarabout, Directeur de recherche au CNRS, Laboratoire d'Ethnologie et de Sociologie Comparative - LESC

Indicative bibliography

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