

Places of imagination – spaces of affect (Göttingen, 30 Mar 1 Apr 11)

Emsel, Dorothee

Places of imagination - spaces of affect:
Forming the sacred through media (1100-1600)

Göttingen, 30 March - 1 April 2010

CALL FOR PAPERS

Deadline: 31 October 2010

Sacred places and religious spaces are of vital importance in the Christian culture of the Middle Ages. Jerusalem as the site of the passion of Christ was regarded as the centre of the material world which pointed towards the celestial city and could be projected onto other places, turning these into an embodiment of itself. The buildings and the rituals of cities were mapped onto sacred topographies. In processions and in mental pilgrimage, spaces and places were evoked in the imagination which merged the actual location with a sacred site. Communal and individual religious practices use affects to create sacred spaces, typically exemplified in the settings of devotional forms of emotional and physical participation in and re-enactment of Christ's passion. By practices such as these, places and spaces are not only invested with sacred meaning. The contact with sacred space and the actions performed in it also have an effect on the objects and the people involved, which can be understood as a sacramental transformation.

In our view, the importance and the power of sanctified places and sacred spaces results from practices of media, such as the separating and arranging of space by architecture, and their fashioning by art, music and language. Sacred spaces actuate and guide performances, which in turn grant their permanence and shape the experience of them. The planned symposium is meant to give an impulse for a (re-)consideration of the relation between media and (sacred) space, conceiving this relation as productive and transformative. We suggest the concept of practices of media as one focal element of such an approach. It seems more promising than the traditional distinction between production and reception for an analysis of how sacred topographies are constituted and how they take effect. Practices of media involve images, texts, music, ritual and

theatrical play. In this framework, relics and the eucharistic species can also be regarded as media. In which way do media such as these partake in the transferral and the signification of the sacredness of locations? How can we describe the roles of imagined, virtual and affective space? How are sacred topographies joined with one another?

Another focal point concerns the space of the medium, a space which is specific to the medium and is influenced by its formal, material and technical conditions. Examples are initial illustrations in manuscripts in the form of portals, which define a spatial dimension of the text lying behind them, or pictures which do not only show an illusionistic space but also connect this space to the recipient's surroundings. The performance genres of procession and theatrical play also constitute their 'own' spaces of the medium.

In contrast to earlier studies which applied an exegetical approach to church architecture and liturgical performances in the tradition of medieval hermeneutics, we encourage a perspective which does not consist in decoding the meaning of images, texts, music etc., but rather focuses on the media-specific practices of space as well as their affective and (quasi)sacramental effects. In this context, we invite a debate on key concepts such as 'imagination', 'virtual space' and 'affective space'. Another area for analysis concerns the relation between the topographies and topologies of the ars memorativa and the organisation of sacred places and spaces.

We are calling for papers on medieval and early modern Christian culture (cultural studies, history, art history, literature, music, religious studies, theology) which address and combine two or more of the following areas. Complementary papers on similar phenomena in other religions and epochs will also be considered.

- space and affect
- artefacts and texts which constitute and transfer places
- artefacts which give form to space (architecture, micro-architecture)
- artefacts which organize or change a given space (e.g. winged altarpieces)
- media-specific spatial practices
- media-related merging of places or superimposition of one place upon another
- space in mnemonic techniques and in imagination

The symposium will be held in German and English. Accommodation costs will be covered by the organisers and travel expenses may be paid after prior consultation.

Please send your exposé of max. 600 words by 31 October 2010 to

Heike Schlie, Zentrum für Literatur- und Kulturforschung, Berlin:

schlie@zfl-berlin.org

Elke Koch, Georg-August-Universität Göttingen: ekoch1@gwdg.de

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