

Press Release

When People Hear Voices from Beyond

A novel research project discovers reports of voices “from beyond” in many religions and cultures – new multi-media volume with texts, images, audio play and videos – interdisciplinary research at the Cluster of Excellence on the medium of the “voice”

Münster, 5 October 2017 (exc) Not just material for fantasy films: according to research findings, people have been concerned with “voices from the beyond” since antiquity until today in various works of art as well as life contexts. “Be it texts or images, radio or films: many works show that people from different eras and religions hear voices that they regard to be divine. They also speak to spiritual beings, for instance when exorcising demons. This connects this world with the afterworld,” says literary scholar Prof. Dr. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf from the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of Münster University in Germany. In a novel research project, she analysed the medium of the “voice” in Hinduism, Christianity, Islam and other religions with researchers from various subjects. The group’s results were published in a multi-media work called “Stimmen aus dem Jenseits / Voices from Beyond” in the series “Religion and Politics” edited by the Cluster of Excellence.

In addition to contributions by the authors involved in the project in German and English, the volume also contains the sources that were analysed: texts and images as well as audio samples and videos on an enclosed DVD. “For a book on the voice must be able to speak,” says Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf. “The book has many voices: the individual articles are written from the perspectives of different academic subjects and are commented on from the view of other academic subjects.” The sources range from the conversion story of Augustine and historical mourning rituals of Australian aborigines to the audio play “Die Zikaden” (The Cicadas) by Ingeborg Bachmann, a realization which, after years, has been made accessible again by the approval of the NDR, a German public radio and television broadcaster.

Human and Disembodied Voices

“The voice is a particularly complex medium: owing to its fleeting materiality and placelessness it can hardly be determined,” Prof. Wagner-Egelhaaf explains. “It seems to evade any discursive access.” In this interdisciplinary project, the academic has collaborated with a group of religious and literary scholars, ethnologists, theologians, historians and sociologists. In numerous sources, the group discovered human voices, which were raised during religious performance, as well as disembodied voices that were only heard, approaching the listener from outside, and which were often ascribed to gods or spirits. The voice that asks Augustine to read the Bible in his conversion report is part of this. The idea that sacred texts are revealed by god is also based on the concept of a voice that the writer hears: Christian art history depicts this for example by showing an angel and an evangelist together. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf: “‘Inner voices’ as well are perceived as a human link to a divine sphere, for instance like the idea of the ‘voice of the inner light’ that was developed by the group of Quakers in 17th century England.”

What effect human voices have in religious rituals is presented in the volume by referring to video recordings from the Muslim Sufi temple Bava Gor in India: pilgrims suffering from forms of possession bring the torturing demonic spirits into a dialogue with spirits of saints – using their own human voice. The power of the spirits is thought to defeat the demons, ethnologist Prof. Dr. Helene Basu explains. Researchers present sermons of the Hindu guru Morari Bapu as a “religious soundscape”, in which the religious sense of togetherness and the experience of the individual does not arise from eye contact but from “ear-based social relation”.

In different religions, human voices occasionally interlace with those from the beyond. “Tutorial dialogues between a Hindu guru and his disciples create a relationship from human being to human being, at the same time that which is taught is considered to be originally divine,” scholar of religious studies Prof. Dr. Annette Wilke says. “The religious group of the ‘Chinmaya Mission’ sees this constant transfer of knowledge as an image of the river deity Gaṅgā, as a flowing river of masters enlightened by voices.” An interlacing of voices from the afterworld and this world is also described in a religious conversion report from the 19th century: words that a Saxonian schoolmaster travelling in the USA first perceived inwardly, made him convert to Mormonism when a missionary voiced these exact words at a later time.

Metaphysical importance of radio voices

Some articles of this book look further than the world religions. Using the example of radio voices and the audio drama “The Cicadas” (Die Zikaden) by Ingeborg Bachmann, it is shown how voices without a visible origin are ascribed to a metaphysical importance and a special authority even outside the world religions. Media scholars thus see a “particular affinity of the radio towards metaphysical materials”.

The book project is a result of the workgroup “Secularisation and sacralisation of media” at the Cluster of Excellence within the scope of the research field “Mediality”. The authors are literary scholars Prof. Dr. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf and PD Dr. Christian Sieg, scholar of religious studies Prof. Dr. Annette Wilke, Catholic theologian Prof. Dr. Reinhard Hoeps, ethnologists Prof. Dr. Helene Basu and Mrinal Pande, historians PD Dr. Klaus Große Kracht, Dr. Felicity Jensz and Simon Rappelle as well as sociologist Silke Müller. In the volume, they also reflect on the chances and limitations of interdisciplinary collaboration. (ill/vvm)

Note: Wagner-Egelhaaf, Martina (Hg.): Stimmen aus dem Jenseits / Voices from Beyond. Ein interdisziplinäres Projekt / An Interdisciplinary Project (Religion und Politik, Vol. 14), Würzburg: Ergon-Verlag 2017, 318 pages, 27 images, DVD, ISBN 978-3-95650-262-0, 58.00 Euros.

Note: For review copies, please send an email to service@ergon-verlag.de.

Image caption: Prof. Dr. Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf (Photo: Hilla Südhaus), book cover (Ergon-Verlag)

Contents

I. Verbalinspiration [Verbal inspiration]

Quellen: Bilder zur Verbalinspiration [Sources: Images on verbal inspiration]

Reinhard Hoeps: Matthäus und der Engel. Verbalinspiration bei Caravaggio [Matthew and the Angel. Verbal Inspiration in the Works of Caravaggio]

Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf: Der göttliche Körper der Stimme (Kommentar) [The Divine Body of the Voice, Commentary]

II. Die Stimme der Konversion [The Voice of Conversion]

Quelle: Die Bekehrung des Augustinus (Confessiones) [Source: The conversion of Augustine]

Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf: Die Stimme der Konversion [The Voice of Conversion]

Reinhard Hoeps: Ubi est lingua? (Conf 8, VIII/18). Die Stimme in Augustins Bekehrungserlebnis (Kommentar) [The Voice in Augustine's Conversion Experience, Commentary]

III. The Voice of the Inner Light

Source: The Quakers' Dream or The Devil's Pilgrimage in England

Simon Rapple: The Voice of the Inner Light

Helene Basu: The Voice of Crisis (Commentary)

Felicity Jenz: Quakers' Use of Print in 17th Century England (Commentary)

IV. Ein sächsischer Mormone [A Saxonian Mormon/Latter-day Saint]

Quelle: Ein sächsischer Schulmeister im Mormonenlande [Source: A Saxonian Schoolmaster in Mormon Country]

Klaus Große Kracht: „Ein sächsischer Schulmeister im Mormonenlande“. Die Stimme und die Kirche Jesu Christi der Heiligen der Letzten Tage in einer Bekehrungsgeschichte des 19.

Jahrhunderts [A Saxonian Schoolmaster in Mormon Country. The Voice and the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints in a Conversion Story of the 19th Century]

Felicity Jenz: Eine Stimme auf Reisen. Mormonen und Schulmeister im 19. Jahrhundert

(Kommentar) [A Travelling Voice. Mormons and Schoolmasters in the 19th Century, Commentary]

V. The Voice of Mourning

Source: Signs of Mourning for the Dead

Felicity Jenz: The Voice of Mourning

Mrinal Pande: The Voice of Ethnography (Commentary)

Simon Rapple: The Taming of the Voice. Death and Mourning in the British Empire (Commentary)

VI. Zikaden [Cicadas]

Quelle: Die Zikaden (Hörspiel) [Source: The Cicadas, audio drama]

Christian Sieg: Stimmen aus dem Äther. Zur Metaphysik und Autorität von Radiostimmen in der Medientheorie und in Ingeborg Bachmanns Hörspiel *Die Zikaden* [Voices from the Ether. On Metaphysics and Authority of Radio Voices in Media Theory and in Ingeborg Bachmann's Audio Drama *The Cicadas*]

Klaus Große Kracht: Ratschläge zur De-Akusmatisierung der Stimme nach Ernst Hardt

(Kommentar) [Recommendations on the De-Acousticisation of the Voice according to Ernst Hardt, Commentary]

VII. Die Stimme des Gurus [The Guru's Voice]

Quellen: Bilder zur „Ganga des Wissens“, Audio „Geeta at a Glance“ und Video mit Lied

„Meditate on Guru“ (Guru Dhyayee) [Sources: Images on the “Ganga of Knowledge”, audio “Geeta at a Glance” and video with song “Meditate on Guru” (Guru Dhyayee)]

Annette Wilke: Die göttliche Stimme des Guru und die Ganga des Wissens [The Divine Voice of the Guru and the Ganga of Knowledge]

Martina Wagner-Egelhaaf: Die Stimme(n) des Flusses (Kommentar) [The Voice(s) of the Flowing River, Commentary]

Helene Basu: Visualisation of the Voice (Commentary)

VIII. Ramkatha Soundscape

Source: The Stage of the Ramkatha

Mrinal Pande: Listening to Voices

Silke Müller: The Ramkatha with Morari Babu as an Ear-Based Social Relation? (Commentary)

Simon Rapple: Mapping the Ramkatha Soundscape (Commentary)

Annette Wilke: Imaginary Spaces, Emotions and Ethics in Hearing the Story of Ram (Commentary)

IX. Voices of Possession

Source: Voices of Possession (Video Diary)

Helene Basu: Voices of Possession – Dialogical Selves

Mrinal Pande: Voice Hearing in Gujarat (Commentary)

Annette Wilke: Die Göttin Stimme, hörbare Geister und die Macht der Mantras in der Kontaktzone Indien (Kommentar) [The Voice as Goddess, Audible Spirits and the Power of Mantras in the Contact Zone India, Commentary]

Christian Sieg: Voices of the Past (Commentary)

Stimm-Wunder? Nachgedanken zur Interdisziplinarität [Vocal wonders? Thoughts on Interdisciplinarity]

Contact:

Dr. Regina Illemann

Centre for Research Communication

at the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”

Johannisstraße 1

48143 Münster

Phone: 0251/83-23376

Fax: 0251/83-23246

religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de

<http://www.religion-und-politik.de/>

If you wish to unsubscribe from press releases by the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics”, please send an e-mail to religionundpolitik@uni-muenster.de

The Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of WWU Münster

At the Cluster of Excellence “Religion and Politics” of Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster (WWU), some 200 academics from more than 20 disciplines in the humanities and social sciences and from around 14 countries deal with the complex relationship of religion and politics across epochs and cultures: from the antique world of gods, Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle Ages and early modern times to today's situation in Europe, America, Asia and Africa. It is nationally the largest research association of its kind and of the 43 Clusters of Excellence in Germany, it is the only one to deal with religion. The federal government and the state governments support the project within the scope of the Excellence Initiative with 40.1 million euros from 2012 until 2018.