

Research project B13

Transformations of Political Image Programs in Dictatorship and Democracy: Comparing Political Performances (Machtinszenierungen) in Italy and Germany from 1922/1933 to the End of the 1960s

Mitarbeiter

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Project description

Research Project B13 examines the transformation of political image programs in Germany and Italy from the seizure of power by the fascist movements until the end of the 1960s. A serial analysis of magazine photographs of events and persons in political life will be conducted on a broad range of empirical materials using a cultural-historical mode of inquiry.

Two parallel social changes in the first half of the 20th century made the medium of the illustrated magazine ideal for analysis as political performance (Machtinszenierung). First, the massive distribution of newspapers and magazines marked the basic politicization of broad sectors of the populace who then were increasingly incorporated into the political domain. From this point on, public opinion had to be “counted on” as a political factor. Second, a medial transformation took place in this period, allowing the powers-that-be to take advantage of the new media of photography and film for the rapid distribution and conservation of political performances.

A constitutive factor for research on this project is a comparison of four fields: in addition to the synchronic juxtaposition of political performances in Fascist Italy and National-Socialist Germany as well as in both democratic successor states, a diachronic comparison between dictatorship and democracy promises to provide insight into the relationship between politics (performed) and the media.

In connection with reflections on fascist aesthetics, we will place in synchronic comparison characteristics of formalism and personalizing the political in Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany. Guiding questions will be: in what way and with which models of performance did the continuous visualization of an extraordinary charisma take place? Which images of political roles were made use of for the performance, how were these represented concretely, and what methods were employed to encounter charisma when it became “petrified” or used up? How does its relationship to the broader masses of the populace get represented—masses which were supposed to be bound to the social community through the performances? An objective of this part of the research is to work out a matrix of political dramatizations in the photographic culture of the dictatorial systems.

In addition, an essential focal point of the research will be the systemic rupture of 1945. Here it is important to examine which consequences of the media system can be recognized in such

fundamental changes of the political system. When and how did a transformation take place in visual culture, which methods of representation were used to visualize changes in democratic decisionmaking, and which parameters conditioned the performance (Inszenierung) of politicians?

Methodologically the work is structured in two related parts: 1) the analysis of the image materials (displays of series of specific topics and examinations of the visual patterns as well as exemplary case studies); 2) the discursive imbedding of the images in an institutional and cultural-historical framework (the conditions of producing the images, titles of the images which guide interpretation in certain directions, transfer exchanges between the fascist brother-states, etc.)

The project is thus undertaking a double comparison of the photographic culture(s) in dictatorial and democratic systems using the example of the press photo genre, pursuing in this way a visual matrix of the political.