

Research project C10

Boundaries of Understanding: Generational Identities in Germany after 1945

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Project description

Abstract

The research project C 10 analyses the thematic complex of generations in the fields of literary studies and sociology. This interdisciplinary approach highlights the complexity of the different nuances of the concept of generations. "Generation" is examined here as a temporal category as well as a concept of identity conditioned by the situation of the individual and of the collective in a variety of temporal corridors of experience. Against this conceptual background, the representation of paradoxical social processes through which non-communicatable experiences from the past are transformed across generational boundaries becomes apparent. Both sub-projects – informed by different data and their respective disciplinary methods – deal with the dimensions of the concept of generation which organize time and constitute identity in Germany after 1945.

The sociological sub-project analyzes data with reference to two fields of media. On the one hand, three generations grouped around the so-called "1968ers" were interviewed in different families. The biographical constructions which emerge from such interviews can be examined with reference to generational identity formations and to integration. Further to this, this project also analyses discursive trends in that it examines the manifold transformations of the term "generation" in the media between 1985 and 2005. And it semantics associated with the concept as well as whether narratives about generations become more or less fluid in the process.

The sub-project in literary studies examines literature about fathers and families which has emerged since the 1970s. On the one hand, it examines the representation of relationships between the generations. On the other, it attempts to analyze the specific meaning of these texts for social discourses, with a particular focus on the specific contribution such texts make as literary products in relation to discussions about generations and confronting Germany's past. Here a central role is played by the intuition that literary writing makes it possible (in a limited way) to mediate experiences that are not otherwise able to be mediated across

generational boundaries, resulting in the development of public discourses. A particularly interesting question is to what extent literature may also be able to raise latent, unconscious experiences to the level of consciousness in society.