

Research project C3

Serial Production of Individuality: On the Symbolic Formation of Personal and Environmental Referents in Medial Orders of Observation and Recognition

Mitarbeiter

- Soeffner, Hans-Georg, Dr. phil., Prof., em.(Research project leader)
Fachbereich Geschichte und Soziologie
- Müller, Michael, Dr. rer. soc., Research project member
Fachbereich Geschichte und Soziologie
- Sonnenmoser, Anne, Research project member
Fachbereich Geschichte und Soziologie

Project description

In the framework of the research proposed, we will focus on an empirical phenomenon that has taken on a clear contour in the past years: the mass mediation of normative styles and body-images as disseminated and approved by so-called style and image experts. In a social situation like the present, in which the individual is increasingly faced with compulsory self-formation and self-representation due to a social structure conditioned by processes of individualization, the mass-mediated dissemination of pre-packaged style products, certified body-images and technologies of self-improvement offers a large number of our contemporaries an alternative to forming one's own style and image.

Nonetheless—and this is the systematic approach of the project—new media-formed orders of social observation and recognition have emerged with the mass-mediated proliferation of styles. Here the conditions of perceiving one's self and environment are fundamentally transformed for each media consumer. In place of an interactive genesis and confirmation of personal and environmental referents in constellations of mutual social mirroring, there is a tendency toward a mediated, “mirrored” environment of generalizable ideal images. What guarantees the formation of individuality (according to our hypothesis) in modern mass-mediated orders of observation and recognition no longer appears to be what is confirmed by symbolic projecting of a self-image within everyday orders of interaction, but instead the professionally verified rejection of one's own gaze upon one's own body and everything which touches this source of “most originary evidence” (Husserl)—food, clothing, interior decoration, etc.

This research project is interested in analyzing the symbolic character of individuality as it is conditioned by mediated orders of observation and recognition. It examines the medial over-formation of social mirror relations as well as their particular meaning in that framework, a meaning that body-images and experts arrive as symbolic proof and normative confirmation of personal self-legitimation within (or, depending on one's perspective, beyond) everyday contexts of interaction. In continuing the work of the project up to this point, the research clarifies the historical processes of transformation involved in modern figurations of individuality. Using a new social-theoretical approach, it has as its objective the development

of an empirically-based theoretical model which specifically accounts for the mediated conditions and mechanisms in the social figuration of personal and environmental referents.