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Making Sense as a Cultural Practice - Historical Perspectives. Forschungsschwerpunkt Historische Kulturwissenschaften, Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz, 18.09.2012-20.09.2012.

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Making Sense as a Cultural Practice - Historical Perspectives

In the cultural and social formations of the past, practices exist for the generation and integration of moments having and giving a sense with the objective of strengthening the cultural and social cohesion. Such practices and processes have a constructive character, even if this is not always the intention of the actors themselves. The Conference focused on two dimensions of the construction of sense: firstly on their forms and media and secondly on the politico-social structural conditions which are, of course, for their part already a product of interpretation. As the production of sense is one of the central fields of action of cultural and political practice, the academic objective of the interdisciplinary conference is to examine how, in different contexts, the construction of sense was organized and implemented as a cultural practice.

JEORJIOS MARTIN BEYER (Mainz) commented on the discourse on natural catastrophes in Thucydides. Stating that Thucydides' interest is primarily war closely connected with man as an acting and suffering subject, his analysis is based on the significance of natural catastrophes in the history of the Peloponnesian War. Thucydides' explanation of catastrophes can be seen as a change to a more rational handling of historical events with two areas of responsibility: natural and human. Hence Thucydides' history should be read as a pamphlet for the keeping of social order which tries to deal with the social consequences of disasters more than their scientific causes.

RUBEN ZIMMERMANN (Mainz) analyzed that the parable genre as a form of re-use (Wiedergebrauch) fulfills the narrative function of communicating the past and thereby provides lendable models for the process of shaping the identity and community of the Early Christians. Zimmermann defined a parable as a fictional historical text based on reality with implicit or explicit markers of differentiation between literal words and the text, an appeal structure and the challenge for the reader to carry out a metaphoric transfer. He concluded that parables have a sense-making role through their mnemonic function for the community as well as for the individual identity.

CHRISTINA LUTTER (Vienna) presented a paper intimately connected with the SFB 42 'Visions of Community' that aims at analyzing medieval visions of a community in a transcultural perspective. She discussed the making of a community within a religious environment and its fluent transitions to the world "outside", highlighting that visions of community not only bestow meaning on social groups but that they in turn confirm and, at the same time, change them in and through social practice. Thus, community can also be defined as a social practice: Monastic *vita communis* is characterized by regularity, organization and discipline to train community habitually and performatively.

MARIA MAIR (Vienna) analyzed different ways of making sense of 'community' in Gutolf of Heiligenkreuz's *Translatio S. Delicianae* by looking at indicators of shared belonging, i.e. denominations of "we/our" (nos/noster) Because Gutolf´s social affiliations to the groups addressed in the Translatio seem to have become loose at the time of its writing, Mair argued that one of the text´s issues can be assessed as an attempt to reinforce these former relations.

PAOLO PERANTONI (Verona) focused on the family book of the Venetian textile-merchant Bartolomeo dal Bovo and its historical value as an 'ego-document'. The heterodox content of Dal Bovo's book, written by different persons, allows the research of several aspects of cultural and social history of the period. Perantoni pointed out, that the book created a font of knowledge as well as a genealogy of the family's nobility to strengthen their standing in the upper classes.

Asking for the conceptualization of knowledge, ANE OHRVIK (Oslo) presented an analysis of the genre of

Black Books (Norwegian: Svartebogen). Black Books as "know-how" books were produced by writers of various social and cultural backgrounds, the oldest dating from 1480, and the youngest from the late 19th century. Ohrvik concentrated on the strategies of authorization of knowledge in the examined books, naming three main methods: the style of production, the repetition of authorship and the reference to sources. She concluded that the validity of knowledge is produced through placing it in time and space and connecting it with material objects, whereby a sort of biography of knowledge is developed.

ANNE ERIKSEN (Oslo) commented on Johannes Lilienskiold's Grand Tour, started in 1668, travelling through Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, England and the Netherlands. Eriksen focused on Lilienskiold's travel book that contains numerous lists, which are structured in primary lists of places within a city and secondary lists of things on or at these locations. The list system, which is of particular scholarly interest, allows to organize and to reflect the gained educational knowledge. Additionally, this collection captures knowledge and shows the competences of its producer and 'owner'. Thereby, experiences become moveable items through the transformation from objects to observations and from observations to written lists.

BRITA BRENNA (Oslo) focused on Johannes Lilienskiold's Speculum Borealis, asking for the modes of description used in this untypically written natural history. This description of the Finmark can be connected to several descriptions of the personal environment by naturalists in the 17th century as reactions to the emerging descriptions of the 'new world'.

JÖRG ROGGE (Mainz) discussed how political meaning has been created in late medieval Britain and the relevance of public spaces in this process. Especially the inauguration of new kings needed the evocation of a certain political meaning in order to show the legitimacy of the monarch. In the paper he gives three examples - from Scotland in the middle of the 13th century and from England in 1399 and 1461 - where different claims to power clashed and special political settings were used to communicate the rightfulness of the new ruler. This aim was achieved by symbolic practices e.g. gestures and speeches, and by political settings which were constituted both by places and crowds.

JAN KUSBER (Mainz) focused on different ways of understanding the autocratic rule of Ivan the Terrible, the first Czar of Russia. This new title symbolized the new dimension of power he claimed as a divine ruler. Ivan's conquests were added to the title and so they gained symbolical meaning. He also communicated his measures through different media and thereby influenced them, e.g. his impact on icon painting. Another way of making sense was his correspondence with other European rulers, where he could demonstrate his impressive education. Jan Kusber pointed out the sense-making of Ivan the Terrible by politicians and historiographers during the centuries up to now.

SIMONE LONARDI (Padua) analyzed how historians are able to follow the paths of news and information exchange based on Camillo Badoer's relations as an informer of the *Inquisitorio di stato* in Venice during the second half of the 17th century. Badoer gathered information about public opinion and especially by using printed gazettes he pointed to the dawn of journalism in this time, which modified the relationship between government and subjects.

FEDERICO BARBIERATO (Verona) argued that the spread of information in early modern period affected and outlined the conditions for the development of widespread political and religious skepticism. Since the 17th century people were confronted with a flood of printed gazettes and written manuscripts which were controlled by different interest groups. People perceived the truth as something temporary and developed a political skepticism which was transferred to religious matters later on. As a result, the Bible was no longer an authority and Gazettes created a possibility for people to take part in the political process.

ANU KORHONEN (Helsinki) referred to the Renaissance body as a powerful signifier of identity and social status, which had to be read by the spectator with considerable practical knowledge and skill. Using the example of the fool, she discussed the cultural practice of making sense of the body. The identification of the fool relies mainly on his physical attributes and his habits - his costumes, looks, gestures etc. Some of his accessories, e.g. the cockscomb, became a synonym for the fool itself, others were of practical use in the fool's performance. His body was considered to be ugly and deformed with similarities to the appearance of animals, while his habits were childish and vulgar in order to question the social norm.

JONAS LILIEQUIST (Umeå) argued the correlation of the dropping homicide rates since the late 17th century and the change of the idea of manliness. The concepts of "honor", "manliness" and "virtue" were given a slightly new meaning in public discourse. This process was a highly emotional affair in which ridicule and laughter were used as rhetorical weapons to discredit the old ide-

als. The discrediting of the duel, the idealization of the service of king and fatherland and the upgrading of civil virtues were the discursive strategies in this conflict.

ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI (Verona) focused on classifications of passions in the 16th century, when a discourse on passions arose from the territories of medicine and philosophy and intersected with new political and religious concerns. The most popular taxonomies and value systems, by which early modern writers made sense of feelings and psychological conditions as well as suggested paths to a good life, were provided by Stoicism and Aquinas. Arcangeli outlined the circulation of and interaction between these paradigms in a variety of 16th century texts and related them to meaningful historical contexts.

HANNA KIETAVÄINEN-SIREN (Jyväskylä) dealt with the perception of the emotion "Love" in court records in late seventeenth-century Finland. Kietaväinen-Siren stated that love had a sensible and a non-sensible side which was measured by the social acceptance of the relationship. Whereas in legal relationships love was attributed to God's providence (when a couple fell in love, God wanted them to marry), in unaccepted relationships love was attributed to witchery and magical practices.

MARJO KAARTINEN (Turku) discussed the cultural practices of making sense of breast cancer as well as the manner in which its understanding was a cultural practice. In her sources, from medical treatises to doctors' casebooks and from patients' letters to prescription collections, various explanations for cancer were given, but emotional reasons became manifest and were repeated in nearly every report. Especially the emotional arguments became evident for gendering cancer to women, to whom strong passions such as anger, sadness and hysteria. It is surprising that there is no evidence for a religiously motivated blame respectively cancer seen as a religious punishment.

EIVIND ENGEBRETSEN (Oslo) commented on hunger as a cultural category by the close reading of two appeals for alms from Beauvais in 1662. As in the case of cancer, also hunger had a gendering aspect by corrupting key-symbols of gender role models: the fear of being a bad mother or the father's disability to protect and care for his family. Engebretsen then explained that hunger had a place, and that there was a difference between rural and urban people. Especially in cities the social impact of hunger became evident in upper classes, where nobles were ashamed and afraid of losing their reputation.

CAY-RÜDIGER PRÜLL (Mainz) analyzed how diabetics interpreted their disease of becoming equivalent members of the Western Germany society. Since 1957 diabetics' self-awareness and self-confidence increased and they were able to shape their identity by emphasizing their healthy way of life - especially in contrast to contemporaries who suffered from overweight and hedonism. The process of understanding diabetes through specific conduct values as well as specific medical visions helped to integrate this social group as reliable members of the society.

The conference showed that practices and processes of making sense was throughout times, from Thucydides until the modern view on diabetes, essential for humans to recognize their world and find their place in it. The constructive character of sense making, which was confirmed during each lecture, also appeared in all kinds of source material. Both, historiographical and serial sources proved to be valid to answer questions related to the said cultural process, which is not bound to a certain part of human life. Rather, making sense as a cultural practice becomes evident in different fields: in religion, politics, and communities as well as emotions, knowledge and medicine. Further research can be founded on many different types of sources turned out to be very fruitful for questions of making sense.

Conference Overview:

Session 1: Religion

Jeorjios Martin Beyer (University of Mainz): Contingency - On the Construction of Meaning in Thucydides

Ruben Zimmermann (University of Mainz): The Parables of Jesus as Media of Collective Memory. Making sense in the Shaping of New Genres in Early Christianity

Session 2: Communities

Christina Lutter (University of Vienna): Constructions of Communities - Representations of Groups. Medieval Texts and Practices

Maria Mair (University of Vienna): Making Sense of 'Community' by narrating a common past. Historiographic Texts and Practices

Session 3: Knowledge

Paolo Perantoni (University of Verona): Cultural diffusion in the early modern age: the case of Bartolomeo Dal Bovo's family book

Ane Ohrvik (University of Oslo): Knowledge making and authorization strategies: the case of Black books in Early Modern Norway

Anne Eriksen (University of Oslo): Making sense of Europe. Johannes Lilienskiold and the Grand Tour.

Brita Brenna (University of Oslo): Johannes Lilienskiold and his Speculum Borealis

Session 4: Politics

Jörg Rogge (University of Mainz): How to create political meaning in public spaces? Some evidence from late medieval Britain

Jan Kusber (University of Mainz): Making sense of autocratic rule: The Case of Ivan the Terrible

Simone Lonardi (University of Padua): The dissemination of news in early modern Venice: a walk in company of the informer Camillo Badoer

Federico Barbierato (University of Verona): Political and religious scepticism in early modern Italy

Session 5: Emotions

Anu Korhonen (University of Helsinki): How to read a Renaissance fool: Visuality, materiality and symbolic practice

Jonas Liliequist (University of Umeå): Honour, virtue and manliness - changing concepts of social prestige in early modern Sweden

Alessandro Arcangeli (University of Verona): Sixteenth-century classifications of passions and their historical contexts

Hanna Kietäväinen-Sirén (University of Jyväskylä): Between sense and sensibility. Constructing emotions in late seventeenth-century Finland

Session 6: Medicine

Marjo Kaartinen (University of Turku): Making sense of illness - gendering medicine 1300-1700

Eivind Engebretsen (University of Oslo): The Semiotics of Hunger in Seventeenth Century France

Cay-Rüdiger Prüll (University of Mainz): Making sense of diabetes - Public discussions in early West Germany 1945 to 1970

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