

Introduction¹

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I.

The general theme of this volume is based on the assumption that human beings want to understand themselves, their environment and reality, and thus give them a sense. 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 of cohesion have a constructive character, even if this is not always in the minds of the actors themselves.

At the same time, the production and genesis of sense is not only dependent here on various media and discourses. Above all, it is not to be understood as a constant *creatio ex nihilo*, but is based, as a rule, on previous knowledge, traditions and normative concepts which are constantly being interpreted and rewritten. Consequently, they are subject to complex historical transformations. Every change, or the results of the same, then form at the same time the starting point for new practices and modifications, for instance when new experiences are classified by the development of new holistic or solidarity concepts, and given a sense. Such modifications and breaks with traditions, just as much as phenomena of the crisis of sense, the loss of sense or the destruction of sense, cannot be logically deduced, but only determined by and from concrete historical cultural practice.

1 Jörg Rogge has written part one of this introduction; Matthias Berlandi and Judith Mengler have written part two of this introduction, based on their conference report, which was published at Mainz, January 2013 (http://www.historische.kulturwissenschaften.uni-mainz.de/Dateien/Rep_Making_Sense_09.04.2013.pdf, 14.04.2013).

Constructions of sense and the interpretation of the world by contemporaries are accordingly a part and result of cultural practice. The construction of sense becomes tangible above all in the production of texts, sculptures and works of art, of rituals and ceremonies, as well as in the reception and transformation of the traditional sense contents associated with these material-sensory forms of expression. These practices can be linked with different sense dimensions and objectives – for instance with political legitimation, transcendent-religious orientation, cultural conceptions (of oneself) and constructions of identity.

Therefore the constructions of sense differ with regard to their range, their subject matter and with regard to their claim to recognition. The procedures and practices of the genesis of sense differ; and therefore it is not possible to decide solely at a theoretical level in what manner, in what forms and with what means and results discursive and other practices generate sense. Depending on the goal being striven for with the generation of sense and taking account of the respective political and social structural conditions, the forms and means of construction of sense vary. Therefore there must be an investigation on the basis of case studies how exactly these practices were employed in historical situations and how they functioned. That is taking place in this volume in the case studies presented by participants.

The papers in this volume are concentrating above all on two dimensions of constructions of sense: firstly on their forms and media and secondly on the politico-social structural conditions which are, of course, for their part already products of the interpretation work.

Cultural practices of the construction of sense make use firstly of specific media and forms of the presentation, handing down and modification of sense. These range from ritual rules and staging through structural models and patterns, pictures and presentation diagrams to language patterns and literary genres, as well as general forms of sentence and style. These media and forms differ greatly historically and have different, but always considerable influences on the handing down and representation of sense in each case. The possibilities and restrictions of the different media and materialities bring about specific course settings, asymmetries and exclusions. Nevertheless, even in well-worn semantics and dominant media, new ways can be taken for the construction of sense. These then lead to radical cultural changes and changes of media, or to new developments of forms of expression and reorientation in the history of ideas.

Secondly, cultural sense-giving processes do not take place (or for the most part do not do so alone) in an area of discursive contextlessness. On the contrary, they are shaped precisely by prevailing political and social conditions. The specific characteristic of concrete constructions of sense thus becomes accessi-

ble only by taking account of the sense-generating practices of the respective politico-social circumstances. But conversely, interpretations, that have been handed down, modified or newly developed, can also contribute to the legitimation or delegitimation of social and political constellations. Historical-political contextualisation therefore also takes a look at the reciprocal effects in cultural practice, here above all the interpretation and objectives of social and political constellations.

As the production of sense is among the central fields of action of cultural and political practice, the academic objective of this interdisciplinary volume is to examine how, in different contexts, the construction of sense was organised and implemented as a cultural practice. In addition to the recording of the production of sense in concrete terms in the case studies, in relation to the respective social formations, in the articles the methods and theories applied for research into cultural conditions for the genesis and production of sense are reflected upon. In order to achieve comparative results in the case studies, the contributors to this volume are dealing with one or more of the following questions:

In what forms and media is sense conveyed, transformed and modified in the different historical situations? To what extent do medial prerequisites and conditions, with their respective distinctive feature; contribute to the genesis of sense? How and in what forms are sense-generating practices represented even in cultural artefacts? To what extent do medial overlappings succeed in making a mark in this connection on these representations? What function do medial aspects fulfil in the context of cultural sense practices? How is legitimation striven for and acquired through integration into sense traditions, for instance, through staged references to representation models and established patterns of representation?

What specific possibilities and restrictions are associated with different media and forms of representation? In what relationship do the media and forms of representation stand to the politico-social circumstances and the structures of meaning constructions? How do the politico-social circumstances influence the cultural practices of the genesis of sense? What effects do modifications of the structural and institutional prerequisites have on the cultural practice generating sense – and why? How do political and social orders stabilise or destabilise sense-giving processes? How do sense-giving processes and their results react on the politico-social conditions of their origin? In what relationship do the politico-social circumstances stand to the media and forms of representation and the structures of sense constructions?

In the course of the conference and in the modified articles in this volume, these questions had been put into concrete terms as the contributors exemplify

and present the politico-social conditions for constructions of sense, as well as the forms and media used for this in the fields under examination religion and piety, knowledge, political cultures, identities, corporeality and emotions.

II.²

RUBEN ZIMMERMANN analyzes the parable genre as a form of re-use (*Wiedergebrauch*) which fulfils 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 presents a paper that aims at analyzing medieval visions of a community in a transcultural perspective. She discusses 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.

PAOLO PERANTONI focuses 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 in the 15th century, 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 analysis 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

2 Unfortunately and due to different circumstances Jeorjios Martin Beyer (Mainz), Maria Mair (Vienna), Jonas Liliequist (Umeå), Hanna Kietäväinen-Sirén (Jyväskylä) and Brita Brenna (Oslo) had not been able to publish their papers in this volume.

concentrates 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 concludes 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 comments on Johannes Lilienskiold's Grand Tour which started in 1668, travelling through Germany, Switzerland, Italy, France, England and the Netherlands. Eriksen focuses 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.

JÖRG ROGGE shows 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 focuses 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. Ivan 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 points out the sense-making of Ivan the Terrible by politicians and historiographers during the centuries up to now.

SIMONE LONARDI analyzes 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 argues that the spread of information in early modern period affected and outlined the conditions for the development of widespread political and religious scepticism. 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 scepticism 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 refers 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.

ALESSANDRO ARCANGELI focuses 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 outlines the circulation of and interaction between these paradigms in a variety of 16th century texts and related them to meaningful historical contexts.

MARJO KAARTINEN discusses 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 ENGBRETSSEN comments 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 explains 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 analyzes 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.

