

It's certainly not a spanking new, instructive idea to discuss Popular Culture as a mode of socialization; but in face of the fact that the commercialisation of social life is well known and a more and more accepted phenomenon and there is hardly any societal field that is not confronted with being an economic target I will argue to renew our considerations about the relationship between Culture and the Media, political rationalities and the dominance of economic issues.

Indeed there is no reason to assume a big turn to critical communication and media studies – at least if I think of communication and media studies in Germany. Nevertheless we can notice that some media studies remarkably connect the analysis of, for instance, Reality-TV and their audiences with radical changes in society in which more and more people realize the consequences of new requirements of the labour markets, an increasing level of unemployment and the experience of a shift in the mode of working and thinking and living (see Sauer 2001; Bernhold 2002; Klaus 2006).

In concrete terms individuals are faced with a situation in which procedures and long-term relationships that had led to the forming of human beings being aware of themselves so far, have entered a state of crisis and these tendencies of individualization do not concern certain social groups only but every individual. Only a few people believe in individualization as autonomy – in my eyes this only works for top layers in society; instead we have to realize that the dismantling of social security systems radicalizes individualization in a new way.

Referring to current developments in German society Ulrich Beck isn't very optimistic: »The society of more relied on the state, the society of less is based on the individual which is released up to limitations of its possibilities« (Beck 2005). In his eyes this is a crucial change of power strategies which is not longer concerned with controlling, subordination and social security but on organizing a discourse of self responsibility for success and failure. Everybody, he comments cynically, may volunteer to cut back one's own possibilities and train oneself to adjust to it. Unfolding then means: Everyone becomes the trainer of one's adaptation to the less.

On the assumption, that concerning societal integration in post-modern societies mediated experiences are said to take the place of personal experiences some academics ask to look at TV-genres as part of power technologies in neo-liberal societies: According to this perspective talk shows, for instance, are said to promote a common sense about how to communicate with each other; they produce models of acceptable standardized subjectivities and behaviour and suppose certain kinds of subjectivities embedded in societal inequalities (see Seifried 1999). Some colleagues interpreted Container-shows like »Big Brother«, the Austrian »Taxi Orange« or Casting-Shows like »Pop Idol«, »Star Search« or »Fame Academy« that were and are broadcasted around the globe as laboratories for the neo-liberal character. They argue that at

work as well as in everyone's life course »self responsibility«, »self management« and »self-organisation« are increasingly expected under the conditions of short term employment, decreasing wages, reduced social insurances and protection. Under these conditions people experience the heightened responsibilities and the moments of autonomy to which they have to respond as »active subjects« as a new constraint or excessive demand. Referring to these developments Reality-Shows are interpreted as models to enact into these new forms of »subjectivations« or »technologies of the self« to correspond to the new societal challenges.

In my paper I will discuss Reality-TV-shows as media (re-)presentations of the on-going commercialization of social life, which invites producers as well as recipients to adjust market principles to all social fields. The casting- and beauty-shows' success may signal a correspondence between people's everyday experiences such as unemployment, low rates, competition, struggle and the neoliberal utopia that apparently provides opportunities for everyone and evokes neoliberal subjectivity and its performance via gendered bodies. I will go into the performances of gendered body in more detail – not only to analyse the making of the modern face and body (if you think on shows like ›I want a famous face‹ or ›The Swan‹) but also to reflect the use of the body as social capital in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu (i.e. as an investment for improving career prospects) and to interpret body performance as self government in the passage between to govern and to be governed.

To analyze the complexity of heteronomous and self-disciplining in a satisfactory manner, my paper suggests combining concepts of Governmentality Studies, Gender Studies and Cultural Studies as a strategy to study equivalents, structural correspondences and differences in the use of media and social change.

The intent is not to suppose a determination through neo-liberal ideology and its paradigms, but rather an interaction between neo-liberal rationalities, media representations and people's practices. Reality-Shows may serve as one example to explore how people's trust in the market – the integration of which into society is usually denied – may grow with specific media strategies, which build community and tends to conform with neo-liberal ideas.

References

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