

Image – Object – Performance:

Mediality and Communication in Early Modern Contact Zones of Latin America and Asia

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Even before our postmodern age of multimedia, processes of human communication have been determined through the use of and the connection between different kinds of media. Unfortunately, our own view on the past, which is focused on classical writing systems and written sources, constricts our senses and leads us to apply Eurocentric models of communication to non-European contexts. In our historical analysis, we are not used to consider the multiplicity and complexity of medial communication structures, which are organizing human coexistence and the production of meaning globally and ever since. In order to observe the historical dimensions of these communication structures, a change of perspective is necessary.

Therefore, the analysis of historical communication processes or trans-cultural phenomena of the past, should not be limited to written sources, but pay particular attention to other medial forms of expression. This includes visual media and objects of the daily life or ritual use as well as architectures or performative expressions, where the act itself produces meaning.

The aim of the workshop is to discuss from different methodological and thematic perspectives, the possibilities and problems of an inclusion of visibility, materiality and performance as categories of historical and/or anthropological analysis. The presentations from disciplines like history, visual studies, literature and archaeology focus on case studies of Early Modern Latin American (Bolivia, Brasil, Mexico, Peru) and Asian (Philippines, India) contact zones. As a result of the contact between different cultural systems, these spaces of communication are particularly suited to visualize differences in medial structures as well as in systems of perception and representation. On the other hand, these zones are characterized by intercultural dynamics which lead to specific transformations of the involved communication systems and their media.

One example are the differences between Catholic and indigenous understandings of images or materializations of sacredness within Latin America, which have been affecting processes of change and negotiation of religious systems continuously. Another example is the meaning of materiality for the configuration of communities of communication. That means to consider objects of daily use as well as materializations of political, social or religious imaginations and orders, for example in textiles, ceramics, ritual objects, relics, sanctuaries or architectures, as markers of belonging to certain spaces of communication. But they can also be analyzed regarding their involvement in performative practice which marks another field of communication. In this approach, the category of performance is of particular interest because it's the performative act, where images and objects produce and receive collective meanings.

Thus, the workshop aims to examine and to compare not only single phenomena or levels of communication and their medial expressions, but also discuss inter-medial dimension of the production of cultural, religious or political meanings.