

## Call for Papers

### Practices and their Bodies.

### What Kind of Artefact is the Lived Body?

Transdisciplinary Conference, April 25th-27th 2013, Mainz University

The human body as the subject of research still sits very firmly in the grasp of the natural sciences. Nevertheless, cultural studies and social sciences have put forward two fundamental insights on the body vis-à-vis established biomedical knowledge. Firstly, both anthropological and phenomenological approaches have delved into the inner perspective of our inhabited bodies by viewing the 'lived body' as the foundation of all cognition and as the fundamental site of sensory perception, personality, and subjectivity. Secondly, ethnological and historical semantic studies have shed light on the extreme variability of 'the body' subject to societal knowledge regimes. Human *bodies* span an infinite plurality of cultural classifications and historical discourses – a bundle of linguistic categories, medical imaging, interpretation and explanation patterns. Our natural scientific knowledge of the body is part of historically and culturally specific ethnosemantics.

This conference proposes a third fundamental sociocultural way of viewing the body, namely as a component of material culture. In recent years the term *practices* has oftentimes been used to express this perspective – a conception of human action and behaviour that places controlled bodily movement at the centre of social life. As a part of *material* culture the body is without doubt an artefact. It has limited capabilities, is practically shaped by food, medicine, and socialisation, and wears out through practical use. However, it is a special material thing: it can learn, i.e., through usage it is materially (re)shaped, disciplined, and is impregnated with habits, and it can specialise in body techniques: instrumental music, handicraft, sports, martial arts, and sex, to just name a handful of such specialisation possibilities.

However, as part of material *culture* the body has another specific quality: it is the fundamental and, even in the age of technological telecommunication, the inescapable *medium* of communicative practices. This holds true for its everyday use in linguistic communication – for speaking and hearing, reading and writing – and for the unstoppable display of visual signs through gestures, facial expressions, and clothing, by means of which bodies are constantly depicting cultural differences (e.g. gender, ethnicity, or status). Moreover, this applies for the body in professionalised cultural practices – e.g., pantomime, acting, and dance – and for the specific interconnection of disciplined bodies with telecommunication artefacts.

The conference aims to consolidate contributions of diverse disciplines (e.g., sociology, history, anthropology, cultural and media studies) in order to converge on possible answers to fundamental questions regarding a sociocultural view of the body. What kind of an artefact is the lived body? How many bodies does a human being have? Which language(s), images, and practices were and are used in pre-modern, modern, and post-modern times to evoke which bodies? What is the communication technological potential of bodies? How does the material

body correspond to the perception of the lived body and of 'mental' activities? What are the variations that 'marginal bodies' bring to light: damaged, animal, dead, embryological, and engineered (cyborg) bodies? Furthermore, cultural studies and social sciences face a number of methodical challenges: How is it possible to capture such a mute object as the body empirically? In which sign systems does it present itself: do bodies 'speak' their own language? Is it possible to access culturally different and historical bodies of the past? What kind of descriptive language can be developed that is independent of biomedical ethnosemantics? And finally, how can we deal with the idiosyncratic bias in light of the fleshy mass in between the ends of our hair and toes that we show a portion of the front side of to each other at conferences?

Keynote Speakers (confirmed): Chris Shilling (University of Kent), Annemarie Mol (University of Amsterdam), Paul Stoller (West Chester University), Gesa Lindemann (University of Oldenburg) und Martin Dinges (University of Mannheim).

Abstract submission (for papers of 20 min.): one page maximum until January 1st, 2013 to: [symposium2013@socum.uni-mainz.de](mailto:symposium2013@socum.uni-mainz.de)

The conference will be bilingual (English and German)

More information about the programme and registration will be presented on our conference homepage by February 1st, 2013: [www.symposium2013.socum.uni-mainz.de](http://www.symposium2013.socum.uni-mainz.de)

The conference is hosted by SOCUM, the Research Center of Social- and Cultural Studies Mainz, and the Research Unit Historical Cultural Sciences

Conference Organisation: Stefan Hirschauer (Sociology), Matthias Krings (Anthropology), Jörg Rogge (History)